Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Dr. Amina Inloes

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـَ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imāms, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

From the preceding 32 volumes of this translation, any readers new to ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī have doubtlessly gleaned an appreciation of the magnitude of ʿAllāmah's work, his methodology, and his life. Still, some introductory remarks are in order.

Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (1904-1981) is best known as ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, or simply ʿAllāmah ("the learned") due to his vast knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence, philosophy, exegesis, and other traditional subjects. A Twelver Shiʿi, he was born in Tabriz but lived extensively in the two Shiʿi scholarly centres, Najaf and Qom. He lived a life of austerity and poverty, dedicating his time and meagre resources to study, teaching, and worship; his students recall that his home was so small, that when they visited him, some had to sit outside.

ʿAllāmah is best known for this work, *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, arguably the most influential and comprehensive modern exegesis. An uber-*tafsīr*, *al-Mīzān* replaces piles of other books. Like most other Islamic scholarly works, *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* is written in formal Arabic (sometimes complex and circuitous Arabic), and this translation is of the original Arabic text. ʿAllāmah reportedly penned sections of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* every day, except on Ashura – discipline and dedication that shines through. However, the prominence of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* should not overshadow ʿAllāmah's contributions to contemporary Shiʿi thought and the Shiʿi response to Western modernity, especially philosophically. ʿAllāmah was also an ardent mystic, and while he keeps his mystical unveilings duly veiled from his exegesis, he nonetheless grants a subtle emphasis to matters of the unseen, as is especially apparent in this volume.

This particular volume features a translation of ʿAllāmah's exegesis of Sūrah al-Fāṭir, Sūrah Yā Sīn, Sūrah Ṣāffāt, and Sūrah Ṣād (Chapters 35-38 of the Qur'an). All or mostly of Meccan provenance, these chapters are of middling length and share an esoteric bent: one, Sūrah al-Fāṭir, opens with a proclamation about the angels; and another, Sūrah al-Ṣaffāt, embarks upon the subject of the jinn. Thus, this volume offers greater discussion of these topics.

In particular, the first section of the exegesis of Sūrah Ṣāffāt doubles as

a treatise on Islamic beliefs regarding angels. Citing Qur'anic verses, narrations, and ratiocination, ᶜAllāmah explains that angels are wholly obedient to God and mediate between the divine and the mundane. ᶜAllāmah also offers his own observations on what it might mean for the angels to be "winged", and whether or not angels have bodies; both observations are refreshing in the face of today's mass-produced cute angel statues. Specific angels, such as Jibrāʾīl and Mīkāʾīl, are described further in the narrations quoted, which also address questions of human interest such as whether or not angels copulate. While these points are relevant to Islamic theology in and of itself, they are also of help in comparing Islamic angelology to that of other Abrahamic or Near Eastern traditions, thereby identifying both the similarities and differences between the conception of angels in Islam and other traditions.

Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt also begins with a discussion of the angels, since one understanding of the potentially ambiguous expression *ṣāffāt* ("the ranks") – and the one that ᶜAllāmah favours – is that it symbolizes the angels lining up in ranks. Thus, this chapter furthers the discourse on angels, before segueing to a discussion of the evil jinn (*shayāṭīn* or "mini-satans"). A special section is dedicated to the "piercing flame" or shooting star alluded to in 37:10, which some classical exegetes took to mean that evil jinn are chased away from the earthy by shooting stars. Noting that this interpretation is rooted in a mediaeval cosmology which is no longer viable today, ᶜAllāmah offers an understanding of this verse based on a broader spiritual cosmology, which encompasses the divine realm of *malakūt* rather than being limited to the physical layers of the earth's atmosphere. ᶜAllāmah also includes a narration from Imam ᶜAlī which may pique the interest to today's UFO-hunters: "These stars in the sky are cities [or civilizations, *madāʾin*] like the cities on earth."

Satan also looms in these chapters, particularly in Sūrah al-Fāṭir, which identifies Satan as the deluder and the enemy; and Sūrah Ṣād, which tells of how Satan disobeyed God when God created the human being (Adam) and commanded Satan to bow to him. Together, these sections of the exegesis build a greater understanding of the Islamic conception of Satan. For instance, how does Satan's power compare to God's? Can Satan control human beings, or only whisper to them? Can Satan physically harm human beings? The latter question is particularly relevant in the story of Job, since both the Qur'an and narrations indicate that Job's afflictions happened at Satan's bequest (38:41). Sūrah Yā Sīn also gently

chides human beings for worshipping Satan, leading to the overall question of what that actually means (beyond building a statue to Baphomet in Detroit), and how many humans actually go that route.

Whether involving Satan or other matters, the exegesis of Surah Yā Sin should be especially well received, given the prominence of Sūrah Yā Sīn in the Islamic world. Celebrated as the "heart of the Qur'an", it is commonly recited over the deceased, for blessings, weekly, or on other occasions. While many Muslims memorize Sūrah Yā Sīn, some may still have lingering questions about what obscure parts of it actually mean – for instance, who or what is the *imām mubīn* ("clear registry", 36:12), and does it have anything to do with Imam ʿAlī? And do we know where and who the "people of the town" to whom God sent two messengers and then "strengthened them with a third" (37:13-14) were?

Beyond these topics, like the other chapters of the Qur'an, these chapters emphasize God's oneness and omnipotence; as an oft-cited verse in Sūrah Yā Sīn says, *Whenever He wills something, He says to it "Be!" and it is* (36:82). Since many of the Meccans were polytheists, these chapters feature a dialectic between monotheism and polytheism in its various forms – that is to say, polytheism involving the worship of wholly unreal things (such as false gods), or the worship of real things (such as angels, jinn, or stars; see exegesis of 39:40) – a distinction often lost in modern exegesis.

Throughout this volume, ʿAllamāh employs the same methodology as in the other volumes. He begins with a meticulous evaluation of the verses, honing in on definitions, etymologies, and grammar. Some of these discussions may seem redundant to the English-language reader – after all, didn't the translation just tell us what the verse means? – but one should keep in mind that today's translations of the Qur'an are based on a long heritage of exegesis, and that things that seem obvious in a contemporary English translation of the Qur'an may not be obvious from the text alone. He then evaluates various classical and contemporary exegetical views, accepting some and refuting others. Philosophical discussions pepper the more pedestrian discussions of matters such as Arabic grammar. He then wraps up each section of verses by presenting narrations relating to the verses at hand, sometimes critiquing them with respect to their reliability and concordance with the Qur'an, or lack thereof. Although ʿAllāmah writes as a Twelver Shiʿi authority, he nonetheless considers both Sunni and Shiʿi exegetical views and narrations throughout his exegesis – something that could be missed if one does not consult the footnotes to see who he is

citing. Topics of special interest in Islamic thought or in his era are given their own section, such as the section on shooting stars.

It is our hope that this volume provides engaging and thought-provoking reading and also serves as a helpful reference for the study of the Qur'an and contemporary exegesis. We have done our best to make the translation as clear and readable as possible; while, at the same time, some of ʿAllāmah's discussions are inherently complex. Perhaps he wished for the reader to stop and ponder over some of his more philosophical discussions.

Lastly, as always, credit needs to be given to the Tawheed Institute of Australia and the tireless efforts of Ali Khalfan in keeping the *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* project alive, as well as the many others contributing to the project financially, intellectually, and otherwise. Special appreciation is also due to Shaykh Mohammad Saeed Bahmanpour for reviewing much of this translation and clarifying difficult passages. As always, the faults are my own – or, maybe, Satan's? Alas, certainly my own.

Amina Inloes, translator
London, UK
January, 2022

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Chapter 35

Sūrah al-Fāṭir

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Verse 1

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This chapter focuses on three principles: (a) the oneness of God in His lordship, (b) the message of the Messenger, and (c) the return to God [in the afterlife]—and establishes proof for them. To facilitate that, the text recollects some magnificent divine blessings, heavenly and earthly, and points to His precise administration of the universe, in general, and of humanity, in particular.

This is preceded by an overall mention of how God is the only one who can grant or restrict mercy—that is, endow or restrict blessings—in the verse: *Whatsoever mercy Allah opens unto mankind, none shall withhold…* (35:2).

And this is preceded by mention of the agents of His extended mercy and gifted blessings. They are the angels, mediating between Him and His creation, in delivering different types of blessings from Him and bringing them to His creation. Thus, the chapter begins by mentioning them.

The chapter is Meccan, as the content of the verses indicates. However, some exegetes have excluded two verses from this, namely: *Those who recite the book of Allah and establish the prayer and spend of what We have provided them secretly and openly, hoping for an exchange that will never perish.* (35:29) and *Then we gave the book as an inheritance to those of our servants whom We chose. Among them is the one who wrongs his own soul, and among them is the one who takes a middle course, and among the is the one who is foremost in acts of good by the permission of Allah. This is a high grace.* (35:32)

It is not clear from the content of these verses whether they were revealed in Mecca or Medina.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلائِكَةِ رُسُلا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَّثْنَى وَثُلاثَ وَرُبَاعَ يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاء إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١﴾

(35:1) ***All praise be to Allah, originator of the heavens and the earth, maker of the angels as messengers with wings two, three, and four. He adds to creation as He wills. Allah has power over all things.***

According to al-Rāghib, *fiṭr* means to cleave something apart lengthwise. *Fāṭir* is applied to God figuratively, to indicate that He clove apart nothingness and took out the heavens and the earth from its belly. The gist of it is that it means He is the one who first brought the heavens and the earth into being, without any prior model to follow. This is similar in meaning to [the divine names] *badīʿ* and *mubdiʿ* (the creator, the innovator); the difference between *ibdāʿ* (creating, innovating) and *fiṭr* (creating, originating, cleaving) is that *ibdāʿ* rests upon not having a prior model to copy, whereas *fiṭr* rests upon dispelling nothingness and bringing a thing into being for the first time, unlike a Maker (*ṣāniʿ*) who fashions new and different things that had never been before.

The heavens and the earth together refer to the visible universe and everything created within it. The phrase either (a) is a figure of speech used to refer to the whole [that is, the entire universe and everything within it] by mentioning the largest pieces [that is, the heavens and the earth], or (b) may in fact specifically indicate the heavens and earth, due to the enormity and wondrousness of their creation and operation. As the verse says:

> *The creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of man.* (40:57)

In any case, the expression *originator of the heavens and the earth* (fātir al-samawāti wa al-arḍ) is one of the divine attributes. Thus, it implies a continual act of creation, rather than a single act of creation in the past. For He is continually bringing things into being and bestowing existence upon them, without interruption; were this process to be interrupted, things would cease to be!

The adjectives are used in sequence (that is, *originator* then *maker*) to demonstrate why praise must belong to God alone. It is as if it says: "Praise be to God because of how He brought the heavens and earth into being,

and because of how He made the angels winged messengers. Therefore, He is exalted and praised. He forges naught but beauty!"

Maker of the angels* (al-malāʾikah) *as messengers with wings* (ajniḥah) *two, three and four: *Malāʾikah* is the plural of *malak* (angel). The angels are beings which God created as intermediaries between Himself and the visible universe and placed in charge of the domain of creation and legislation (*ʿālam al-takwīniyyah wa al-tashrīʿiyyah*). They are honored worshippers and do not disobey God in any of His commands; rather, they do as they are told.

Maker of the angels as messengers: Here, *angels* is in the plural and is preceded by the definite article *al-* to show that the angels are all being referred to as a whole. This implies—indeed, proves—that all of the angels are messengers mediating between Him and creation in matters of creation and legislation.

However, nothing in this verse requires that *messengers* be restricted to only the angels which descend to the prophets. The Qur'an uses *messengers* (rusul) for other angels, such as in the following verses: *Until death comes to one of them, and then our messengers take his soul.* (6:61); *Our messengers record what you plot.* (10:21); *And when our messengers came to Abraham with glad tidings, they said, "We are going to destroy the people of this city."* (29:31)

Ajniḥah (wings) is the plural of *janāḥ* (wing). It is what a bird has in place of a human hand, and what a bird uses to ascend and descend in the sky, flying from place to place.

Angels are equipped with something similar to birds' wings so that they can travel from the heavens to the earth at the command of God, then return to the heavens, and go from any place to any other place. The Qur'an calls them *wings* because they perform the same function as birds' wings, not because they have feathers or fluff. This is similar to how the Qur'an uses words like *throne* (ʿarsh) or *seat* (kursī) or *tablet* (lawḥ) or *pen* (qalam). [That is, they are metaphorical and do not require that the divine throne look exactly the same as a human throne, etc.]

***With wings two, three, and four* (mathnā wa thulātha wa rubāʿa):** This describes the angels. The form of these numbers indicates repetition, such as things being two by two or three by three. That is, it is as if it is saying: "He made the angels, some with two pairs of wings, some with three pairs, and some with four."

He adds to His creation as He wills: Among the implications of this

sentence is that there are angels with more than four pairs of wings.

Allah has power over all things: This explains (a) everything that was mentioned before it, or (b) the previous sentence; this first view is clearer.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Biḥar al-Anwār*, it is related from *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ*, with a chain of narration from al-Muʿallā ibn Muḥammad, who relates without a chain of narration that Abū ʿAbdullāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said: God, the Mighty and Glorious, created the angels from light.

(2) In *Tafṣir al-Qummī*, it is related that Imām al-Ṣādiq said:
God created different types of angels. Jibraʾīl came to the Messenger of God, and he had 600 wings. On his leg was a pearl like a drop of dew upon leaves. He filled the space between the sky and earth. If God had ordered Mikāʾīl to descend to this world, he would have had one foot in the uppermost [seventh] heaven and the other on the lowermost [seventh] earth. And God has angels which are made half of fire and half of ice. They say, "O you who unites fire and ice, make our hearts firm upon Your obedience." God has other angels too who [are so large] that the distance between their ears and eyes spans 500 years as the birds fly.
The angels do not eat or drink or copulate. They subsist on a breeze flowing from the Throne. God, the Mighty and Glorious, has angels which bow until the Day of Judgment; and God, the Mighty and Glorious, has angels which prostrate until the Day of Judgment.
The Messenger of God said: "God has not created anything more numerous than the angels. Every day or night, 70,000 angels descend and go around the Sacred House. Then they go to the Messenger of God and, after that, the Commander of the Faithful, and send their greetings. Then, they go to al-Ḥusayn and stand before him. When dawn comes, the path back to heaven opens for them, and they never return [to earth]."
Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] said: "God, the Mighty and Glorious, created Isrāfīl, Jibrāʾīl, and Mīkāʾīl from a single act of glorification, and gave them hearing, sight, a sharp intellect, and quick understanding."
The Commander of the Faithful said regarding the creation of the angels: "You created angels and settled them in Your heavens.

They neither tire nor forget [You] nor disobey. They are the creations who know You the best, who fear You the most, who are closest to You, and who are the most obedient to You. Sleep does not overcome their eyes, nor does forgetfulness overwhelm their intellects, nor do their bodies tire. They neither inhabit loins nor wombs. They were not created from a base fluid.[1] You created them as their own creation and placed them in Your heavens, honored them with nearness to You, and entrusted them with Your revelation. You guarded them from slips, preserved them from misfortunes, and purified them from sins. Were it not for Your power, they would have no power; were it not for your firmness, they would not stand firm; were it not for Your mercy, they would not obey; and were it not for You, they would not be. Still—despite their position with You and their obedience towards You, their status before You and their vigilance in fulfilling Your commands—if they were to see what is hidden from them, their deeds would burn, they would see themselves as low, and they would realize that they had not worshipped You as You truly deserve. Glorified be You, the creator, the worshipped. How beautiful is the way You try your creation!"

(3) In *Biḥār al-Anwār*, it is related from *al-Durr al-Manthur*, from Abū al-ʿAlāʾ ibn Saʿd:

One day, the Messenger of God said to his sitting-companions: "The sky has become constricted, and indeed, rightfully so, for there is no spot in it that an angel could place its feet that does not already have a bowing or prostrating angel on it." Then he recited: *We are the ones who line up, and we are the ones who exalt [Allah].* (37:165–166)

(4) In *al-Khiṣāl*, with a chain of narration from Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥah, it is related without a chain of narration from the Prophet that the Prophet said:

There are three types of angels. Some have two wings, some have three wings, and some have four wings.

Author's comments: Something similar is related from ʿAbdullāh ibn Ṭalḥah in *al-Kāfī*. Perhaps the intent is to describe the majority of angels,

1 This may be a tacit refutation of the belief (found in Near Eastern apocrypha) that fallen angels mated with human women to produce a superhuman race that was later destroyed. [Trans.]

so that it does not contradict what the verse and other narrations say.

(5) In *al-Tawḥīd*, it is related via a chain of narration from Abū Ḥayyān al-Tamīmi, from his father, that the Commander of the Faithful said:

There is no person who does not have with him a guardian angel, protecting him from slipping into a well or a wall falling on him or misfortune striking him. Then, when his time has come, it allows whatever befalls him to happen.

(6) In *al-Baṣāʾir*, it is related from al-Sayyārī from ʿAbdullāh ibn Abū ʿAbdullāh al-Farsī, from someone else, without a further chain of narration, that Abu ʿAbdullāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said:

The cherubim (*karūbiyyīn*) are a group of our followers from the first creation. God placed them behind His throne. Were God to allot the light of one of them to the people of the earth, it would suffice them [alt. "it would blind them"].[1] When Moses sought what he sought from his Lord [that is, to see God], He ordered one of the cherubim to shine its light on the mountain, and it crumbled.

(7) In *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, the following prayer is related for the bearers of the throne, and all angels which are near to God:

O God, and [bless] the bearers of Your throne, who tire not from their glorification of You, and never weary from declaring Your holiness. They are never are fatigued from Your worship, never experience any shortcoming in their diligence towards Your command, and are never heedless of love for You.

And [bless] Isrāfīl, the bearer of the trumpet, fixed, awaiting Your permission and Your command to descend, so that he may awaken the fallen, hostages to their graves, with his blast. And [bless] Mīkāʾīl, who has great status before You and a high position in Your worship. And [bless] Jibrīl, who is entrusted with Your revelation, obeyed in the heavens, distinguished before You, and near to You. And [bless] the spirit (*rūḥ*) which is upon the angels of the veils, and the spirit (*rūḥ*) which is from Your command.

O God, bless them and the other angels who inhabit the heavens and earth, and those who have been entrusted with your

1 This is contingent on whether the verb is read as *la-kafāhum* ("it would suffice them") or *la-kaffāhum* ("it would blind them"). [Trans.]

messages; those who are not wearied by perseverance, fatigue, or tiredness. Passions distract them not from glorifying You, nor does forgetfulness interrupt their magnification of You. Their eyes are lowered so they do not steal a glance towards You. Lowered are the chins of those whose desire has long been for You; open are they in celebrating Your blessings; humble are they before Your greatness and magnificence. They are the ones who, when they glimpse Hell roaring over those who disobeyed You, say, "Glory be do you! We have not worshipped you as You truly deserve."

So bless them and the spiritual angels near You. And bless the bearers of tidings of the unseen to Your messengers, and those entrusted with Your revelation. And bless the tribes of angels whom You have preferred for Yourself, and freed from the need to eat or drink through glorifying You, and established in the depths of the layers of the heavens. And bless those who await the descent of the command to fulfil Your promise.

And bless the keepers of the rain and the drivers of the clouds, and the one whose voice is heard as thunderclaps; when the reverberating clouds swim before him, lightening bolts flash, accompanied by snow and ice. And bless those who descend with rain when it falls, and those who watch over the treasuries of the winds, and those entrusted with the mountains, lest they fail. And bless those whom You have taught the weights of the waters, and the measures of torrents and rain. And bless the angels which are messengers to the people of the earth, who bring down hated misfortunes and beloved ease. And bless the noble scribes, the honorable recorders.

And bless the Angel of Death and his aides. Bless Munkar and Nakīr, and Mubashshir and Bashīr;[1] and bless Ruʾmān, who tests people in their graves. And bless the angels which circle *al-bayt al-maʿmūr*, Mālik and the guardians, and Riḍwān and the gatekeepers of the gardens. And bless those *who do not disobey Allah*

1 These four names refer to the angels who question people in their graves. According to narrations, those who will have a difficult questioning see them in a frightening form as Munkar and Nakīr (lit. "the hideous"), whereas believers who acted righteously in this world will see them in a welcoming form a Mubashshir and Bashīr (lit. "bearers of glad tidings"). [Trans.]

in His command and do what they are told (66:6). And bless those who say: "Peace be upon you for what you have endured, and what a blessed end is this abode." And bless the *zabāniyah* who, when they are told, *take him and shackle him, then drive him into hell* (69:30–31), rush ahead without giving him any respite.

And bless those whom we have neglected to mention, not knowing their place with You or with what they have been entrusted. And bless the inhabitants of the sky and the earth and the water, and those of them who have been charged over the creatures. So bless them on the day that *every soul will come with a driver and a witness* (50:21), and bless them with a blessing that will add more honor to their honor and more purity to their purity.

(8) In *Biḥār al-Anwār*, it is related from *al-Durr al-Manthur* from Ibn Shihāb:

The Messenger of God asked Jibraʾīl to let him catch a glimpse of his form. So Jibraʾīl said: "You cannot endure that." He said: "I would like that." So the Messenger of God went to his place of prayer on a moonlight night, and Jibraʾīl came to him in his form. When he saw him, the Messenger of God lost consciousness.

When he came to, Jibraʾīl was holding him, with one of his hands on his chest and the other on his shoulder. The Messenger of God said: "I never thought that anything like this could be in Creation!"

Jibraʾīl replied, "Then how would it be if you were to see Isrāfīl? He has twelve wings—a wing in the east, and a wing in the west—and the throne upon his back. At times, he shrinks before the glory of God, until he looks smaller than a little bird, and then nothing but the greatness of God can bear the throne."

(9) In *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfī*, it is related from *al-Tawḥīd*, with a chain of narration leading to the Commander of the Faithful, that the Commander of the Faithful said regarding *The sight [of the Prophet] did not swerve or transgress; he certainly saw [some] of the greatest signs of his Lord* (53:17–18):

He saw Jibraʾīl in his [true] form twice—on this occasion, and on another occasion. This is because Jibraʾīl is an immense creation; he is one of the spiritual beings whose form and nature none can comprehend other than God.

(10) It is related in *al-Khiṣāl*, with a chain of narration from

Muḥammad ibn Marwān, that Abū ʿAbdullāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said:

The Messenger of God said: "Jibraʾīl came to me and said: 'We angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog or a statue of a body or a chamberpot.'"

Author's comments: There are innumerable other narrations describing the angels in the chapters [of hadith collections] on the Resurrection and the Prophet's Night Journey (*miʿrāj*), as well as in other various chapters. What we have related is a sufficient example of them.

(11) In *ʿUyun Akhbār al-Riḍā*, in the chapter on miscellanea, it is related that he said:

The Messenger of God said: "Beautify [the recitation of] the Qur'an with your voices, for a beautiful voice adds to the beauty of the Qur'an." Then he recited: "*He adds to creation as He wills*" (35:1).

(12) It is related in *al-Tawḥīd*, with a chain of narration from Zurārah, that ʿAbdullāh ibn Sulaymān said:

I heard Abū ʿAbdullāh say: "Destiny and divine decree (*qaḍā* and *qadr*) are two creations of God. *He adds to His creation as he wills* (35:1)."

(13) *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says about *He adds to His creation as He wills* (35:1):

It is narrated from Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet said: "This is a handsome face, a beautiful voice, and beautiful hair."

Author's comments: The last three narrations are specific examples to which this verse can be applied.

Discourse on the Angels

While the angels are discussed repeatedly throughout the Qur'an, the only ones whom are named are Jibrīl and Mikāʾīl.[1] Others are described by their functions, such as the Angel of Death (*malak al-mawt*, 32:11), the honorable recorders (*al-kirām al-kātibīn*, 82:11); the scribes, noble and virtuous (*al-safarah al-kirām al-bararah*, 80:15–16); a ready watcher (*al-raqib al-ʿatīd*, 50:18), and so on.

1 The name of the angel Gabriel sometimes appears as Jibraʾīl, Jibrāʾīl, and Jibrīl because there are slight variants in the way it is spelled in the texts; all are considered correct. The same with the name of the angel Michael. [Trans.]

Four points about the forms and acts of the angels can be gleaned from the Qur'an and the preceding narrations. First, the angels are venerable beings mediating between God and the visible universe. Whenever anything happens—whether it be important or insignificant—an angel or multiple angels has a hand in it. When it is a simple event, it is one angel; when the event is multifaceted, multiple angels are involved. Their role is simply to carry the divine command or divine decree to fruition; as God says: *They do not precede Him in speech, and do as they are told* (21:27).

Second, they do not disobey God's command. They do not have independent personalities with their own wishes such that they might want something other than what God—glorified be He!—wills. They do not act independently and do not tinker with the commands that God charges them with; they neither do more, nor less, nor change what they are told to do. As God says: *They do not disobey Allah in what He has commanded them, and they do what they are told* (66:6).

Third, the angels—given their immense population—have different positions, low and high. Some are higher or lower than others; some command others, and others accept the commands of their superiors. The commanders order the angels beneath them to carry out God's command which He has entrusted to them, and the foot soldiers obey because they are obeying the command of God. They do not have their own preferences about this. As God says: *There are none of us who do not have an assigned place.* (37:164); *Obeyed; thereby, faithful in trust.* (81:21); *They said, "What did your Lord say?" They said, "The truth."* (34:23)

Fourth, they are invincible, for they act according to the command and will of God: *Nothing escapes Allah in the heavens or the earth; He is knowing, powerful.* (35:44); *Allah's command is the victorious.* (12:21); *Allah accomplishes His command.* (65:3)

Thus, it is clear that the angels do not have physical bodies which could perish, decay, or change; which gradually takes steps towards perfection; or which could be impeded or ailed, thereby preventing them from fulfilling their missions.

And from this, it is clear that when the narrations describe the forms and shapes of the angels—and a sample of these narrations was mentioned above—they are speaking of how the angels appeared to the prophets and Imams, not of the angels' actual forms. That is, they do not actually have physical forms or bodies. When an angel appears as a human, it is for the sake of the human viewer—so that he can perceive and interact with a

being that would otherwise be outside his comprehension, and this is done via the interface of a human form. This does not mean that the angels actually become physical beings [in order to appear to people]. The concept of appearing in physical form (*tamaththul*) was discussed in the exegesis of Surah Maryam [because it is in this chapter that the angel Gabriel appears to Mary].[1] As God says in the account of the Messiah and Mary: *And We sent to her our spirit, and he took on an upright human form* (19:17).

It is often said that the angels have subtle bodies (*jism laṭīf*) which can take on different forms, other than a dog or a pig, and that the jinn also have subtle bodies which can take on different forms, including a dog or a pig. However, this is baseless; there is no rational or textual evidence for it, neither from the Qur'an or the established Sunnah. While some claim that the Muslims have consensus on this, their claim only confirms that this view is baseless, for it shows that there is no evidence for this kind of theological assertion.

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1 See Eng. Vol. 27. [Pub.]

Verses 2–8

When speaking of the angels—who act as intermediaries in delivering the divine blessings to creation—the text speaks of blessings in a universal sense as emanating from God, the Exalted, and no one else. He is the sustainer (*rāziq*), and none shares that position with Him. Then it uses His position as the sustainer to argue for His lordship, followed by the resurrection. This is then used to argue for the truth of the promised resurrection, the punishment of the deniers, and the forgiveness of the righteous believers. These verses also express empathy for the Prophet.

مَا يَفْتَحِ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِن رَّحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكَ لَهَا وَمَا يُمْسِكْ فَلَا مُرْسِلَ لَهُ مِن بَعْدِهِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢﴾

(35:2) ***Whatsoever mercy Allah opens*** **(yaftaḥ)** ***unto mankind, none shall withhold. And whatsoever He withholds, none shall send thereafter. And He is the mighty, the wise.***

This means that whenever God grants a blessing to someone—meaning sustenance (*rizq*)—no one else can block it. Similarly, whenever God keeps a blessing from someone, no one else can provide it. Basically, it is saying: "Whatever God sends to people, none shall withhold…."

Here, "open" (*yaftaḥ*) means "send". This is shown by the use of "open" in the first clause and "send" (*mursil, irsāl*) in the second [as synonyms]. Repeatedly, the Qur'an describes God's mercy as lying in stored-up treasures or coffers (*khazā'in*), as in: *Or do they control the stored-up treasures of the mercy of your Lord, the mighty, the giving?* (38:9); *Say: If you held the coffers of the mercy of My Lord, you would be miserly with them, afraid to spend!* (17:100)

Thus, the word "open" is used instead of "send" [in the first clause of the verse] to indicate that God's mercy is stored up in these treasuries or coffers which encompass humankind.[1] [That is, God "opens" his mercy to

1 The modern reader might keep in mind that in the pre-modern and, indeed, pre-digital era, it was necessary for a king to have a physical treasury in order to house a country's wealth, and even a person's wealth would be stored in

people, whereas people might conceive of themselves as "sending" it to each other.] They can only access these coffers when they are opened for them; there is no other way in.

[In the next verse] sustenance (*rizq*) is described as a blessing arising from God's mercy to demonstrate that blessings radiate from God due to His sheer mercy, not out of His own self-interest or so that He might elevate Himself.

And whatsoever He withholds, none shall send thereafter: This means that no one else can provide a blessing which God has put a stop to. *Thereafter* (min baʿdihi) hints that He is the first in obstructing something, just as He is the first in giving it.

He is the mighty, the wise: These two divine names declare the wisdom of what is said in the verse. He is mighty, for none can have the upper hand when He gives or withholds something. He is wise: He gives and withholds wisely, and for the sake of what is best. In short, none can give or withhold other than God, and giving and withholding are done with wisdom.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ
يَرْزُقُكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالأَرْضِ لا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ فَأَنَّى تُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(35:3) ***O mankind! Remember Allah's blessing upon you. Is there a creator other than Allah who provides for you from Heaven and earth? There is no god but He. So how are you deluded?***

The previous verse established that only God can give and withhold, and that He has no partners in this. This verse uses that principle to demonstrate the oneness (*tawḥīd*) of God in His lordship (*rubūbiyyah*).

It argues that a godform can only be a worshipped deity if it has lordship—and this entails control over the management of humankind (and others). Who is it who holds in His hands the administration of these blessings, which wax and wane for people (and others)? Who is it who sustains them through these blessings? It is God, Exalted be He, without

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physical form as coins, foodstuffs, linens, and the like. Such a metaphor would have been very natural throughout the vast majority of human history when wealth took on an embodied form; it is less immediate today, when much of our wealth is virtual. In any case, ʿAllāmah is explaining why the word "opens" is used instead of "sends" for God's mercy, given that "send" might come across as more natural. [Trans.]

any of the other gods which they have taken for themselves. For it is He who created these blessings without any other deities, and the creation has perpetually been dependent on the administration [of these blessings]. So He—Exalted be He—is their god. There is no god but He, for He is their lord who administers their affairs through these blessings which come and go. He is a lord who administers [His creation] with these blessings because He is the one who created them, and He is also the creator of the system which dispenses these blessings.

From this, it is clear that *people* is directed at those people who worshipped idols or who assigned partners to God.

Remember* (udhkurū) *Allah's blessing upon you: *Remember* (udhkurū, from dhikr) is used here as the antonym of "forget", not as a verbal act [for instance, reciting the divine names as a form of *dhikr*].

Is there a creator other than Allah who provides for you* (yarzuqukum) *from heaven [or sky] and earth? Sustenance (*rizq*) is what prolongs existence. It originates from the sky, with its sun rays and rainfall and so on, and from the earth, with its greenery and animal life and so on.

With this, it becomes clear that there is a subtle argument in the text here. *Mercy* in the previous verse has been replaced with, first, *blessing* and, then, *sustenance*. Therefore, it seems as if the text should continue to read, "Do you have any *sustainer* other than God?" or "Do you have any *bestower of blessings* other than God?" or "Do you have any *granter of mercy* other than God?" However, instead, it says, "Do you have any *creator* other than God?" This is a second argument to forestall any objection from those who hold that God created the universe but appointed deities to administer it; therefore, they worship those deities. If the text had said, "Do you have any *sustainer* or *bestower of blessings* or *granter of mercy* other than God?", they might have replied in the affirmative by saying that God had created and appointed their gods to sustain them. However, it is asking if they have any *creator* other than God. This implies that *sustainer* here really means "creator of sustenance". They can only say no—they do not have a *creator* other than God who sustains them from the heaven and earth.

There is no god but He: This interjection declaring God's oneness serves to glorify Him. It resembles: *And they say that Allah has taken a son. Exalted be He!* (2:116) In other words, nothing can be truly worshipped unless it is deserving of worship. And, the one who bestows blessings and sustenance upon them is no one other than God.

So how are you deluded? This is a reprimand stemming from the proofs

that have just been given. In other words, it is saying, "If the matter is like this, and you confess to that, then how long will you shun truth for falsehood, and monotheism for polytheism?"

Exegetes have wrangled copiously over the grammatical nuances of this verse. Some of their points which are relevant to what we have discussed with respect to how the verse delivers a theological argument are as follows:

Min (of or from) is extraneous (*zā'idah*) to express generality. [That is, is there any sort of creator other than God?][1]

The prepositional phrase *other than Allah* (ghayr Allāh) refers back to the word *Creator* (*khāliq*) since it comes after it. The same goes for *sustains you* (yarzuqukum).

Creator (min khāliq) is the subject of a sentence with an elided predicate, which would be *exists*.

There is no god but He! is an interjection, and the clause *so how are you deluded?* resumes the sentence.

وَإِن يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كُذِّبَتْ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٤﴾

(35:4) ***If they deny you, the messengers before you were denied, and to Allah do all matters return.***

These words empathize with the Prophet—meaning, "If they deny you after hearing these resplendent proofs, do not grieve, for this is nothing new. The messengers before you were also denied. Their peoples called them liars, and to God will the entire matter return. He will requite them in the way they deserve for denying the truth after it appeared. They cannot cause harm through their denial."

From here, it is clear that there is an inversion of causality with respect to the sentence *the messengers before you were denied*. [That is, it would be expected to read something along the lines of "if they deny you, do not grieve"; however, "do not grieve" is implied, and "the messengers before you were denied" is in its place. Structurally, it acts as the cause of his grief, even though it was the people surrounding the Prophet who pained him.]

And to Allah do all matters return is linked by "and" to *the messengers*

1 There is a *min* in this verse which is not grammatically required for a complete sentence. That is, instead of saying *is there any creator other than Allah*, it says *is there of/from any creator other than Allah* (hal min khāliqin ghayr Allāh). [Trans.}

before you were denied.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغَرُورُ ﴿٥﴾

(35:5) *O mankind! Allah's promise is true, so do not let the life of this world deceive you, and do not let the archdeceiver deceive you about Allah.*

This reminds mankind as a whole of the return [to God in the afterlife], just as the former verse reminded mankind of God's oneness in his lordship and divinity.

The promise of Allah is true: Meaning that the promise to raise them from their graves and recompense them for their acts, good or ill. *True* (*ḥaqq*) means that it is a firm promise that will happen. This promise is elaborated on in: *Those who belie [the truth] shall have severe punishment, and those who believe and work righteous deeds shall have forgiveness and a great reward.* (35:7)

Do not let the life of this world deceive you: This is a prohibition. Although it is framed as an address to this worldly life, it is in fact addressed to them. It means, "If the promise of God is true, do not be deceived by the life of this world. Do not throw yourselves into the adornments and pleasures of this world which chase the day of accounting from your mind. Do not lose yourselves in chasing after them and turning away from the truth."

And do not let the archdeceiver deceive you about Allah: *Archdeceiver* (gharūr) is an intensified form of *ghurūr* ("deception", "delusion"). It is used for someone or something which habitually goes to extremes in deception. According to exegetes, it appears to refer to Satan; this view is reinforced by the next verse, which begins with *Satan is an enemy to you.*

His deception about God entails first steering their eyes towards the manifestations of God's forbearance and clemency, and then [away from] the manifestations of His trials, and the way He allows people to slide down a gradual decline and dig their own graves. They start to believe that busying themselves with this world, forgetting the hereafter, and turning away from the truth and the True [i.e. the divine] have no consequences or repercussions. They start to believe that whenever the children of this world are kept from their goals and throw themselves into forgetfulness

of God and drown themselves in sins and disobedience, they earn a better living, are at ease among people, and enjoy power and position. It is then that Satan casts into their hearts the notion that honor lies only in worldly success and no one has any idea what lies beyond it. All that the prophets spoke of—the promised reward, the assured punishment, the resurrection, the accounting, the Garden, the Fire—is naught but superstition.

Therefore, the meaning behind Satan's deceiving mankind is being deceived about how God will treat people with respect to their heedlessness and wrongdoing.

Perhaps, *archdeceiver* could also be construed as referring to how this glittering world entices human beings. Thus, *and do not let the archdeceiver deceive you about Allah* would reiterate the meaning of *and do not let the life of this world deceive you*, thereby emphasizing it.

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا إِنَّمَا يَدْعُو حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٦﴾

(35:6) ***Satan is an enemy to you, so take him as an enemy. He only calls upon his party to be the inhabitants of the raging fire.***

This explains why people are told not to be deceived by the archdeceiver in the previous verse. Satan is an enemy because he has no aim other than to seduce people away from a happy life, here and in the hereafter. "Taking Satan as an enemy" means to stay away from those who follow his call towards falsehood and disobedience, which he insinuates through whispers and enticements, as explained in the latter part of the verse (*He only calls upon his party…*).

He only calls upon his party **(ḥizbahu)** ***to be*** **(li-yakūnū)** ***inhabitants of the raging fire*** **(saʿīr)*:*** This provides a justification for what came before. *Ḥizb* ("party") refers to a group of people united on one aim. The letter *lām* in *li-yakūnū* ("to be") indicates that this verb is explanatory; that is, the ultimate goal of his call is for them to be inhabitants of the blazing fire. *Saʿīr* means "a raging fire", and it is one of the names of Hell used in the Qur'an.

الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٧﴾

(35:7) ***Those who reject [the truth] shall have severe punishment,***

and those who believe and work righteous deeds shall have forgiveness and a great reward.

This is the true promise which God has mentioned. *Punishment* (ʿadhāb) is in the indefinite form to emphasize that there are varying levels of punishment, in accordance with their varying levels of denial and corruption. So it is more appropriate here to be obscure [about the type of punishment]. The same is true for the latter part of the verse (*forgiveness* and *reward*).

أَفَمَن زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ فَرَآهُ حَسَنًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَاء وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاء فَلا تَذْهَبْ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَسَرَاتٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٨﴾

(35:8) ***What of the one whose evil acts are made to seem fair to him, so that he thinks them beautiful? Allah leads astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills. So do not let your soul chase after them in regret. Allah knows what they have wrought.***

This affirms the dividing [of people] in the previous verse—meaning, the dividing of people into the deniers, who have severe punishment, and the believers who work righteous deeds, who have forgiveness and a great reward. The intent is to say that since these two groups are not the same, their afterlives shall not be the same.

What of the one whose evil acts are made to seem fair to him, so that he thinks them beautiful?: This is an introductory clause to a sentence whose concluding clause has been elided. The implied meaning is along the lines of, "Are they the same as those who are not like that?" The letter *fāʾ* ("so") indicates that the sentence is intended as a consequence of the previous verse, and it is a rhetorical question with the implied answer being, "No, they are not the same!" The intent behind *the one whose evil acts are made to seem fair to him* is the one who denies the truth (i.e. the *kāfir*), and it implies that this brain has it all backwards. He does one thing and imagines it to be something else. It means, "The person whose evil acts are made to seem fair to him, so he thinks they are beautiful, is not the same as the person who is not like that and, rather, sees evil acts as evil."

Allah leads astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills: This explains why, in the previous verse, the two groups of people are not

the same. That is, through His will, God leads astray the denier who sees foul as fair, and guides the believer who works righteously and sees foul as foul.

This misguidance does not happen at the beginning; rather, it happens as a consequence, and so there is no harm in ascribing it to God. [That is, it would not construe divine injustice.]

In short, the denier and the believer meet different ends for two reasons. The first is the divine promise of punishment or mercy in accordance with their divine guidance or misguidance. The second is with respect to divine guidance or misguidance in accordance with their viewpoint—seeing foul as fair versus seeing foul as foul and fair as fair.

***So do not let your soul chase* (lā tadhhab nafsuka) *after them in regret* (ḥasarāt^{in}):** *Ḥasarāt* ("regret") is the plural of *ḥasrah*, meaning "sadness and regret over what has eluded one". It ends with the accusative grammatical marker -*in* because it expresses the reason why he might chase after them.[1] "Letting your soul chase after them" means "destroying it on account of them due to sadness over their lack of belief".

The sentence comes as a natural consequence to the division of people in the previous verse. It is saying, "Since, before God, people are in two groups—guided and misguided—do not make yourself suffer if they call you a liar or deny you. For God is the one who leads some people astray due to their denial and seeing evil as good. He knows what they do, and this matter is not confusing for Him. He will only treat them justly and recompense them justly."

From here, it is clear that *Allah knows what they have wrought* explains the reason behind *do not let your soul chase after them in regret*. It would not befit the Messenger cast his own soul into undue suffering over them when they are the ones who have strayed and earned punishment. God is the one who has misguided them due to their acts, and He knows what they do.

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1 The accusative feminine plural ends with -*i* instead of -*a*. [Trans.]

Verses 9–14

After recounting the heavenly and earthly blessings that God bestows upon human beings, this section argues for the oneness of God as the deity. There is no creator but Him and no administrator of creation other than Him (exalted be He!). Some of the points refer to the resurrection.

وَاللَّهُ الَّذِى أَرْسَلَ الرِّيَاحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَسُقْنَاهُ إِلَى بَلَدٍ مَّيِّتٍ فَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِ الأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا كَذَلِكَ النُّشُورُ ۝٩

(35:9) *Allah is the one who sends the winds; then they send aloft the clouds. Then We drive them to a dead land and bring the land back to life after its death. Such shall be the resurrection!*

Here, this refers to the actualization of rainfall and the subsequent verdant growth. For this reason, it says, *Allah is the one who sends the winds.* This is different from a similarly-worded verse in Sūrah al-Rūm, which says: *Allah is the one who sends the winds…and when it falls upon those of His servants whom He wills, they rejoice* (30:48) [in that focus of the verse in Sūrah al-Rūm is on people rejoicing at the rainfall, not the springing up of greenery].

They send aloft the clouds is linked to *Allah sends*, and *they* refers to *the winds* [meaning, *the winds send aloft the clouds*]. Although these two verses [35:9 & 30:48] are in the present tense, they tell of what has already happened. *Ithārah* is a noun form (the *ifʿāl* form) of the verb *thāra* ("stirring up", as in *thāra al-ghubār*, "stirring up dust"), used for when something spreads out, sparkling.

Then We drive them to a dead land—meaning, land without growth. *And [We] bring the land back to life after its death*—meaning, "We cause herbage to grow where it was not before." It refers to the earth coming back to life, and may be taken as literal or metaphorical—that is, either the actual plants, or else things such as food, nourishment, growth, birth, and other fundamental aspects of daily life.

For that reason, it resembles the resurrection; bringing the dead back to life is similar to bringing the dead earth back to life—that is, bringing

plants back to life after shrivelling up in the summer heat. *Such shall be the resurrection* refers to the resurrecting and raising of the dead on the Day of Resurrection after their original lives, and taking them out from the graves.

Then We drive them to a dead land: Here, there is a shift from third-person (*Allah sends the winds*) to first-person (*We drive them*). Perhaps, the point here is that when *Allah sends the winds*, it is as if an invisible agent has sent forth the winds, and this happens before the clouds burgeon as evidence of Him sending the winds. Then, when the clouds appear, the pronoun switches to *We*; and, after that, *the winds*—which send the clouds aloft and unfurl them across the sky—becomes the subject of the next verb. The shift in pronoun also reflects His greatness.

We drive them to a dead land and bring it back to life after its death: *We bring back to life* (aḥyaynā) does not require the addition of a redundant pronoun [that is, it does not read *aḥyaynāhu*], nor is *land* repeated in *after its death* (baʿda mawtihā) because what has already been said makes the meaning clear, sufficient, and undoubtable.

مَن كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعِزَّةَ فَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ جَمِيعًا إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ وَالَّذِينَ يَمْكُرُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَكْرُ أُولَٰئِكَ هُوَ يَبُورُ ﴿١٠﴾

(35:10) ***Whoever desires glory and power* (ʿizzah)*—[know that] all glory and power belong to Allah. To Him ascends the goodly word; He raises up the righteous deed. Those who plot nefariousness shall have a severe punishment, and their plot shall fall into ruin.***

According to al-Rāghib in *al-Mufradāt*,

> *ʿIzzah* is what prevents a person from being dominated or overcome. An *ʿazāz* land is one which is hard (*ṣulbah*).

Originally, *ʿizzah* meant "hard" or "firm"; then, the meaning of the word expanded to encompass the use of the word *ʿazīz* ("mighty", "glorious") to speak of a victor who is never vanquished, as in [the story of Joseph]: *O mighty one* (ʿazīz)! *Distress has seized us…* (12:88).

[Other Qur'anic uses of *ʿizzah*:]

It is used to mean "superiority", as in: *He speaks disdainfully (ʿazzanī) to me* (38:23).

ʿIzzah is used for scarcity and rarity, as in: *He has a mighty (*ʿazīz*) book* (41:41).

ʿAzīz is used in its root meaning of "hard" or "difficult", as in: *It is difficult for him* (ʿazīzun ʿalayhi)… (8:182).

ʿIzzah is used to mean "pride" and "disdain", as in: *Those who deny [the truth] are in disdainful pride* (ʿizzah) *and separation*. (38:2)

Given that *ʿizzah* means "someone who always wins and never loses" or "someone who is dominant and never overcome", there is only one being that can truly be called *ʿazīz*, and that is God, the Mighty, and Glorious. Any being other than Him is essentially poor, dependent, and lowly. He does not hold true ownership over any part of his own self, unless God has mercy upon him and gifts him some of his *ʿizzah*, as he did to the believers in: *To Allah belongs glory (*ʿizzah*), and to His messenger, and to the believers* (63:8).

All glory and power belong to Allah is situated as the response to a conditional statement. It is structured in such a way that the cause is stated in place of the effect. That is, seeking glory and power from Him is through worship, and worship itself results in faith and good deeds.

To Him ascends the goodly word* (kalim)*; He raises up the righteous deed: The word *kalim* has been said to be a collective noun indicating a type of thing which can be treated grammatically as either masculine or feminine. *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:

Kalim is the plural of *kalimah* ("word", sing.). It takes both masculine and feminine adjectives.[1] Every plural form of a noun which differs from its singular form only by [the removal of] *-ah* can take both masculine and feminine adjectives.

In any case, *kalim* is used for spoken word conveying a complete meaning [as opposed to, say, babble or random utterances]. The adjective *good* (*ṭayyib*) which describes *kalim* here reinforces this view, in that it involves both the speaker and the listener. That is, in order for speech to be "good", it must issue forth, be pleasing, and come to an end while expressing truth and delighting and uplifting the soul.

For this reason, it is clear that *good word* does not refer to actual speech itself but rather to a "good meaning". It refers to the true beliefs which uplift a person when he assents to them and uses them as a foundation

1 Lit. "It is said *hadha kalim* and *hadhihi kalim* ["these words", m. and "these words", f., respectively]. [Trans.]

for his deeds. The most certain of them is the "word of *tawḥīd*", which all true beliefs stem from, and which is encompassed in this verse: *Do you not see how Allah sets forth a parable, the goodly word is like a goodly tree, its root is firm and its branches stretch to the sky. It bears fruit continually with the permission of its Lord* (14:25). Theological beliefs (*iʿtiqādāt*) have often been referred to as *qawl* (lit. "speech").

The "ascent of the good word to God" refers to it nearing Him and rising higher, for He is the Highest of the High, the Raiser of Ranks. And if that word is a belief embodied in the one who believes in it, then its nearness to God is the nearness of the believer in it to God. Exegetes have also explained that the "ascent of a good word to God" means His acceptance of it; this is one of the necessary corollaries.

If belief and faith are true, they will be expressed in concordant deeds, rather than belied. Actions branch forth from knowledge and are its indelible effects. Whenever an action is repeated, the underlying belief becomes more cemented and visible, and its effects are strengthened. So a good deed—and this is noble, accepted deed stamped with the humility of servitude and sincerity before the face of God—supports a true belief in leaving behind its effects. This is ascent towards God; He is the one who dignifies it by raising it up. Therefore, the good deed lifts up the good word.

This is clear in *to Him (*ilayhi*) ascends the goodly word, and the righteous deed lifts it up.* The pronoun *Him* (*-hi* in *ilayhi*) refers to God. The intended meaning of *the goodly word* is "true belief in the oneness of God". "Ascending" refers to something coming closer to God. A *righteous deed* is one which is done in accordance with and which is befitting of a true belief. The subject of *lifts it up* (yarfaʿuhu) is *the righteous deed*, and the object of it [that is, *-hu* in *yarfaʿuhu*] is *the goodly word*.

Exegetes have also expressed other views on this verse:

Some say that the "ascent of the good word" refers to it being accepted and rewarded for.

Some say that "ascent of the good word" refers how the angels ascend to God with records of [a person's] faith and obedience.

Some say that "ascent of the good word" refers to their [the angels'] ascending to the sky, and "ascending to the sky" is a metaphorical expression for "ascending to God".

Some say that the subject of *lifts* (yarfaʿuhu) is *the goodly word*, and the object of *lifts* is *the righteous deed*, meaning that the goodly word lifts the righteous deed; in other words, a righteous deed is only of benefit if

it issues forth from [belief in] the oneness of God.

Some say the subject of *lifts* (yarfaʿuhu) is God, and it means that God lifts up the righteous deeds.[1]

However, these views are all unlikely; the interpretation we mentioned first is what first springs to mind.

Those who plot nefariousness* (sayyiʾāt) *shall have a severe punishment, and their plot shall fall into ruin: According to exegetes, *nefariousness* (*sayyiʾāt*) stands in the place of an omitted word or phrase, which is "plots". A demonstrative pronoun is used in place of a personal pronoun in *makr ulāʾika* (lit. "the plot of those ones") to show that they are specific, not mixed with others. It means that those who plot evil plots shall have a severe punishment, and the plot of those plotters shall fall into ruin and destruction, and shall not yield happiness or glory for them.

It is clear that *nefariousness* (sayyiʾāt) refers to the different types of plots and schemes that the polytheists employed in order to gain honor (ʿ*izzah*), although the verse encompasses plotting and scheming in general. However, some exegetes say *plots* specifically refers to what the Quraysh did to the Prophet at Dār al-Nadwah[2] and on similar occasions with respect to capturing, exiling, and attacking [him and his followers]. Therefore, God turned their plots back onto them, sent them to Badr, and caused some of them to be killed or captured. Thus, their attempts at capture, exile, and killing were turned back on them. This is a good view; but, still, the verse is general.

To Him ascend… is connected to the end of the verse via *Whoever desires glory and power—[know that] all glory and power belong to Allah*. That is, the polytheists took pride in their gods, as this verse says: *And they have taken gods other than Allah so that they might be a source of power* (19:81). So, while they were seeking glory for themselves by remembering their own gods, God called them [to Himself] and [communicated] that all glory and honor belong to Himself. He made it clear that belief in His

1 The Yusufali Qur'anic translation of this verse reflects this latter view (namely, that God is the one who lifts up the deeds). However, the previous view (namely, that the deeds do the lifting up) is grammatically preferable. [Trans.]

2 Dār al-Nadwah was a place where the noblemen of the Quraysh met to discuss important issues, such as treaties and war. Among the decisions issued there was the plot to murder the Prophet, which led to his migration to Medina. [Trans.]

oneness ascends to Him, and righteous deeds uplift that belief. So when a person comes closer to God, he gains honor from its source. However, those who hatched evil plots to try to seek glory found naught but severe punishment, and their plots fell into pieces. They neither ascended anywhere nor did they bring them glory.

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُم مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ وَمَا يُعَمَّرُ مِن مُّعَمَّرٍ وَلَا يُنقَصُ مِنْ عُمُرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

(35:11) ***Allah created you from dust, then from a drop, then He made you into pairs. And no female carries [a child] or gives birth without His knowledge. No one's life is lengthened or shortened without it being in a book. This is easy for Allah.***

This verse refers to the creation of the human being. Far back, human creation began with dust; then, much closer in time, from a drop.

Some exegetes say that when this verse refers to humanity being created from dust, it refers to the creation of their forefather Adam from dust, and then other human beings are appended to that. Others say that the intent is the creation of Adam specifically. Still others say that the intent is, overall, the creation of humans in general—that humans are created from dust, and this encompasses the creation of Adam from dust and then particular stages of creation, proceeding next to creation from a drop. The difference between this latter view and the first is that, in the first, creation from dust is figurative, whereas, in the second view, "creation from dust" is taken literally to mean the creation of Adam. In the third view, it refers to the creation of the human race, and therefore is neither figurative nor limited to Adam.

Each of these views can be supported by one of the following verses, respectively: *He created the human being from dry clay like pottery.* (35:14) *He began the creation of the human with clay, then made his progeny from a quintessence of the nature of a fluid despised.* (32:7–8) *We created you and fashioned you; then we said to the angels, "Bow to Adam."* (7:11)

Then He made you into pairs: This means that people were created male and female. Some say that this means that human beings were given the capacity to mate, and others say that it refers to the creation of different

groups and tribes of humans. And this is as before.

And no female carries [a child] or gives birth without His knowledge (bi-ʿilmihi): The *min* in this sentence (*wa mā taḥmil min unthā*) puts an extra emphasis on "no". The *bi-* in *bi-ʿilmihi* indicates that the two are together [that is, God is always aware of gestation]. As a clause, it is attached to both *carries [a child]* and *gives birth*, meaning that "no female carries a child or gives birth without His knowledge accompanying the pregnancy and birth." Some exegetes say that it is an adverbial phrase describing the subject. They have said that it is in opposition to the apparent meaning and thus not feasible to say that it is an adverb for both pregnancy (*taḥmil*) and delivery (*taḍaʿ*) and their objects; that is, that which is carried and that which is delivered.

No one's life is lengthened or shortened without it being in a book: Meaning, no one's life becomes long or short unless it is in a book.

No one's life is lengthened (wa mā yuʿammiru min muʿammarin) is similar in structure to, *I see myself pressing wine* (innī arānī aʿṣiru khamran, 12:36). *Muʿammarin* [a grammatically accusative object of a preposition] takes on the role of an absent subject, such as "someone" or "no one" (*aḥad*), in order to show that the person reaches old age only after it is decreed that his lifespan shall be long; otherwise [if someone is already old], the concept of having one's lifespan lengthened would be meaningless.

***Or shortened* (wa lā yanqaṣu min ʿumurihi):** The pronoun *-hi* refers back to *muʿammarin* (the person whose life is lengthened), and, therefore, describes the omitted subject "someone" or "no one" (*aḥad*), indicating that for someone's lifespan to be shortened, it must first be decreed to be long.

Without it being in a book: This is the inalterable Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) which is fixed in stone. On it, it is inscribed that so-and-so person will have a longer life for this-or-that reason, whereas so-and-so person will have a shorter life for this-or-that reason. However, the Book of Erasing and Recording (*kitab al-maḥw wa al-ithbāt*) may be changed; the verses imply that this is part of the recorded (*thābit*) knowledge. There are other views on this verse, but they are weak, and so there is no use presenting them.

This is easy for Allah: This confirms and justifies what is said previously in the verse regarding the description of the creation of the human—how he was originated, and how he endures. It means that this precise,

firm, unrivalled management of created species, both as a whole as well as of each and every one of their individual members, is easy for God, for He is omniscient, omnipotent, encompassing all with His knowledge and power. He is the Lord of humanity just as He is Lord of all things.

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ سَائِغٌ شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ
وَمِن كُلٍّ تَأْكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى
الْفُلْكَ فِيهِ مَوَاخِرَ لِتَبْتَغُوا مِن فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(35:12) ***And the two seas are not alike. One is sweet*** **(ʿadhb)**, ***satisfying*** **(furāt)**, ***and pleasant*** **(sāʾigh)** ***to drink. The other is salty and bitter*** **(ujāj)**. ***But from both, you eat fresh flesh and extract ornaments which you wear. And you see ships plowing through them so that you may seek His bounty and so that you may give thanks.***

Some exegetes say that *ʿadhb* ("sweet") refers to good water, and *furāt* refers to water which slakes thirst. *Majmaʿ* says that it is cool water. *Sāʾigh* refers to water which is easy to drink due to its pleasantness. *Ujāj* is [water] which burns due to its saltiness or bitterness.

But from both, you eat fresh flesh and extract ornaments which you wear: *Fresh flesh* refers to meat which is tender and good; it refers either to fish, or to fish and seabirds. "Ornaments extracted from the sea" refers to pearls, coral, and shells, as also mentioned in: *You extract from both of them pearls and coral* (55:22).

The two seas, one salty and one sweet, are also a metaphor for believers and disbelievers. It shows that the two are not the same in their inner perfection, even though both share in most human endeavours and legacies. However, the believer remains on his inner nature and thereby attains happiness in the eternal life, whereas the disbeliever becomes deviated, takes on things that are not good for his inner nature, and is hence punished for his deeds. Thus, they are like the two different seas, sweet and salty: one is like a water which retains its pristine, pure nature; and the others has left it and become salty. Still, some of the same benefits can be attained from both of them—just as [when it comes to the seas], you can eat fresh meat—meaning fish or hunted seabirds—or collect ornaments that you wear, like pearls, coral, and shells.

The surface level meaning of the verse is that ornaments are taken

from both types of water, sweet and salty. However, a group of exegetes contests that, since pearls and coral are only found in saltwater. There have been various responses to this, such as:

The point of the verse is to show that the two seas are equal to each other in benefit, even though one benefit is only found in one ocean.

You benefit from both of them, just as you eat fresh flesh and gather ornaments that you wear from salt water, and you see ships plowing through them.

The believer and the disbeliever are like water sweet and salty. However, brackish water is superior to the disbeliever, for you derive some benefits from brackish water, whereas the disbeliever is not existentially beneficial. This verse resembles another verse: *Then their hearts became hardened after that, and they are like stones, or harder than stones, for some stones are cloven asunder by rivers or split apart, gushing forth springs; and some fall out of fear of Allah* (2:74).

You extract ornaments which you wear continues the metaphor of the two seas, in that they both share certain benefits, varying in their essence, for the product of one is intertwined with the purity of its inner nature. Thus, even though the believer and the disbeliever may share some noble traits, such as bravery or generosity, they differ in that one has retained his original inner purity, whereas the other has not.

It is theoretically possible to gather pearls from fresh water, even though no one has done this before. Therefore, the objection that pearls only come from salt water is unfounded.

The verse (*Nor are the two seas alike…*) is not a metaphor for the believer and the disbeliever. Rather, it describes the many blessings bestowed by the divine to establish His lordship. It is similar to other verses such as *Allah is the one who sends the winds* (35:9) and *He makes the night pass into the day* (35:13). Thus the verse proclaims the blessings of the sea and the variance between salt and fresh water and what they produce—both the benefits that are shared and are also unique to each.

This latter view is supported by a similar verse in Sūrah al-Naḥl which is to be taken literally in terms of describing the blessings of God: *And He is the one who gave you mastery over the sea, so that you might eat fresh flesh from it and take from it ornaments that you wear. And you see the ships plowing through it so that you may seek His bounty, so that you might be grateful.* (16:14)

However, the objection [that pearls cannot be taken from fresh water]

is baseless. That is, these ornaments are found in both fresh water and salt water, as is mentioned in research works on this subject.[1]

And you **[sing.]** ***see ships plowing through them*** **(mawākhir fīhi)*:*** The pronoun *-hi* in *fīhi* (lit. "in it") refers to the sea. *Mawākhir* is the plural of *mākhirah* ("to cleave", "to plow through"), from the root *makhr*. It refers to the way the prow of a ship cuts through the water as it plows forward.

Some exegetes say that *you see (*tarā*)* is in the second person singular, unlike the previous and succeeding parts of the verse [which are in the second person plural] because the other parts of the verse [such as extracting ornaments from the sea] are addressed to people [such as those who live on the coast] who actually derive benefit from the oceans, whereas this phrase—*you see*—is addressed to everyone with the capability of seeing.

So that you **[pl.]** ***may seek His bounty and so that you may give thanks:*** That is, for that way that it is possible to have mastery over the sea and plow through its waves in order to seek its gifts—namely, sustenance—in order that you might be grateful to God, Exalted be He. We have previously discussed how, in the Qur'an, *laʿalla* ("so that you might", "so that this might happen") is used in an objective or third-person manner to express hope. [That is, it is more along the lines of "it is hoped that…" or "the hope exists that…" rather than "God Himself hopes that…"].

Regarding these two verses: *And you see ships plowing through them* (fīhi mawākhir) *so that you may seek* (li-tabtaghū) *His bounty* (35:12), and *And you see ships plowing through them (*mawākhir fīhi*) so that you may seek* (wa li-tabtaghū) *His bounty* (16:14) they differ in (a) the position of *fīhi*, and (b) whether or *so that you may seek* (li-tabtaghū) is linked to the previous verb with the conjunction *wa* ("and", omitted in translation). Perhaps, this is because the verse in Sūrah al-Naḥl focuses on how God has granted human beings control over various aspects of the natural world (*taskhīr*). Therefore, it is more appropriate for *fīhi* to be delayed so that it refers to traversing the sea and clarifies what is meant by having control over the natural world. Since "control" (*taskhīr*) could refer to many ends, only one of which is seeking God's bounty, it is more appropriate for *so that you may seek His bounty* to grammatically act as if it were appended to other things that are elided so as not to restrict it to seeking

1 A footnote in the Arabic edition invites the reader to consult various encyclopaedias published in the author's country and abroad which discuss freshwater pearls and their sources. [Trans.]

God's bounty. However, here, the main point is to show that God is the provider and manager of creation in order to forestall the objections of those who denied the veracity of the Prophetic message (as has already been discussed); thus, in order to do this, it is sufficient just to speak of seeking God's bounty, without adding anything else.

And God knows best.

Regarding the difference between the two verses, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* says:

> What is apparent to me is that the verse in Sūrah al-Naḥl is situated in a discussion of the multiplicity of blessings, as the previous and succeeding verses hint at, particularly: *If you [try to] count the blessings of Allah, you will not [be able to] number them* (16:18). Therefore, the priority here is to state the blessing first [that is, before *fīhi*], and that is how ships pass through water. This is in contrast to this verse [that is, 35:12], which is either a rhetorical digression or a means of concluding the metaphor (as discussed before). Therefore, *fīhi* is brought forward, indicating that this is not the main point; otherwise, this verse would also have included a *wa* before the *li-tabtaghū*. However, that is not the case here, unlike in the other verse.

يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ذَٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِهِ مَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِن قِطْمِيرٍ ﴿١٣﴾

(35:13) ***He makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night, and He has put the sun and moon in your service, each running for a term appointed. That is Allah, your Lord. To him belongs all dominion. And those whom you call other than Him do not even possess the husk of a date.***

"Making the night pass into the day" (*īlāj al-layl fī al-nahār*) refers to the shortening of the day and the lengthening of the night; and "making the day pass into the night" refers to shortening the night and lengthening the day. The intent of the two phrases is to describe the way nights and days alternate between being long and short in the seasons of the year as the days pass. For this reason, the expression *yūlij* ("enter", "pass into") is used to indicate the perpetuity of the change. This is unlike the paths of

the sun and moon, for they are fixed. For that reason, the expression *He has put the sun and moon in your service (*sakhkhara al-shams wa al-qamar*), each running for a term appointed* is used instead; this is figurative imagery.[1]

That is Allah, your Lord: This wraps up what came before; namely, that if the matter of your creation and administration on land and sea, on earth and in the sky, relate back to Him as the administrator [of the cosmos], then this is god is your Lord; He has true ownership over you and manages your affairs.

To Him belongs all dominion: This is deduced from what is said before it and paves the way for what comes next: *And those whom you call other than Him do not even possess the husk of a date (*qiṭmīr*).*

According to al-Rāghib, a *qiṭmīr* is what remains on the kernel [of a fruit, or date]. It is used as an expression for something insignificant. *Majmaᶜ* says that a *qiṭmīr* is what covers the kernel but that some say that it is a small seed within the kernel. In any case, here, it is a rhetorical device used to disavow that beings other than God could have ownership (*mulk*) [over creation]. *Those who you call other than Him* refers to the gods—the idols and lords—that they used to pray to.

إِن تَدْعُوهُمْ لا يَسْمَعُوا دُعَاءَكُمْ وَلَوْ سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا لَكُمْ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكْفُرُونَ بِشِرْكِكُمْ وَلا يُنَبِّئُكَ مِثْلُ خَبِيرٍ ﴿١٤﴾

(35:14) ***If you call them, they hear not your call; and if did hear it, they would not respond. And on the Day of Resurrection, they will reject the way you made them partners with Allah, and none informs you like the one who is aware.***

This emphasizes what was said before—namely, that *those whom you call other than Him do not even possess the husk of a date*. That is, it affirms that they do not have ownership over anything; if you call upon them, they will not hear your call, for they are earthen idols bereft of sense and perception. The lords of the idols, such as the angels and holy men, are engaged with their own duties, and do not have independent faculties of

1 ᶜAllāmah may be calling attention to the fact that the verb used for the night passing into the day is in the present tense, indicating perpetuity, whereas the verb for the sun and moon being put into the service of humans is in the past tense, indicating that the orbits of the sun and moon have been decreed and are fixed. [Trans.]

hearing; they will only hear if they are made to hear [by God].

And if did hear it, they would not respond: If this means that they have no power to respond in word or deed, this refers to the idols themselves. If it refers to the lords of the idols [as mentioned above], then it means that their power is from God, the Exalted, and that God will not allow any of them to respond to anyone who prays to them as if they were a lord. God says: *The Messiah did not disdain being a servant of Allah, nor do the angels near [Him]. Whoever haughtily disdains to worship Allah shall [still] be gathered before Him.* (4:172)

On the Day of Resurrection, they will reject the way you made them partners with Allah: That is, they shall reject the way you worshipped them and disassociate themselves from you rather than interceding for you. *When those who are followed disassociate themselves from those who are following them* (2:166).

The way that the verse denies that they will respond and says that they will reject being made partners of God on the Day of Resurrection is reiterated here: *And who is more astray than the ones who call on ones other than Allah—ones who shall not respond to them until the Day of Resurrection, until which they will be have been heedless of their call. And when people are resurrected, they will be enemies to them and reject the way they were worshipped* (46:6).

And none informs you like the one who is aware: Meaning no one can tell you about the truth of the matter like one who is truly aware. While the previous sentences are in the second person plural, this sentence is addressed directly to the Prophet. Either this is because the verses were addressing people who did not comprehend the truth, or else this last sentence is addressing the masses in the guise of a sentiment addressed privately to the Prophet, similar to: *And you* [second person sing.] *see ships ploughing through them* (35:12); *And would have seen the sun when it rose…and you would have thought them awake when asleep* (18:17–18).

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* relates regarding *Such shall be the resurrection!* (35:9):

My father narrated to me from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from Jamīl ibn Darrāj, that Abū ʿAbdullāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said: "When God wills to raise the creation, He will cause it to rain from the sky onto the earth for forty mornings. Then the body's joints will link

up and the flesh will grow back like herbage."

Author's comment: Numerous narrations express this meaning.

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from al-Ṭayālisī, Aḥmad, ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, Ibn Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī in *al-Asmāʾ wa al-Ṣifāt*:
Ibn Razīn al-ʿUqaylī said: "O Messenger of God, how will God raise the dead?"
He [the Prophet] said: "Have you not passed through a barren land, and then passed through it again when it is fertile, bursting forth in greenery?"
He said: "Yes."
He [the Prophet] said: "Thus shall God revive the dead, and *such shall be the Resurrection* (35:9)."

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related from Abū Jārūd from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] that the Prophet said:
Every word has a deed which confirms or betrays it. When the son of Adam utters something, and his actions are in line with his words, his words raise his deed to God. And when he speaks but acts against what he says, his words are negated by his ugly deed and is cast into the fire.

(4) In *al-Tawḥīd*, it is related via a chain of narration that Zayd ibn ʿAlī said that his father [Imām al-Sajjād] said:
There is a spot in the heavens belonging to God, the Blessed and Exalted; anyone who halts at that place is brought up to Him. Have you not heard God, the Mighty and Glorious, say: *The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him* (70:4). And He says in the story of Jesus: *Allah raised him to Himself* (4:158). And He says: *To Him ascends the goodly word; the righteous deed lifts it up* (35:10).

Author's comment: Something similar is related in *al-Faqīh*.

(5) *Nahj al-Balāghah* says:
Had they [the heavens] not confessed to His lordship and submitted to Him obediently, He would not have placed His Throne there, nor made them a habitat for the angels, nor a place for the good word and righteous act to ascend to from His creation.

(6) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related from Abū Jārūd that Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] said:
And the two seas are not alike. One is sweet, satisfying, and pleasant to drink. The other is salty and bitter (ujāj) (35:12)—*Ujāj* means

"salty" and "bitter".

(7) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *And those whom you call other than Him do not even possess the husk of a date* (35:13), it says:
This is the thin husk that enwraps the kernel [of a fruit].

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Verses 15–26

Now that it has been made clear to them that the creation and management of the universe are His alone—for He is their Lord with true control (*mulk*) over things, not those whom they call upon other than Him who do not control anything that they might use to look after them—the text embarks upon a second argument for the same thing, but with this one intermixed with threats. Namely, it is that God, the Exalted, is needless of them, whereas they are dependent on Him. If He wanted, He could destroy them and bring about a new creation in requital for what they have wrought.

Then the text shifts to speaking to the Prophet directly about what was happening to him. These [threats of] destruction only encompass the beliers, not the faithful who were genuinely affected by the Prophetic message. There is a clear difference between these two groups. The Prophet was a warner like the warners of yore, and his situation is like that of those warners who have passed. If they call him a liar, thus were other prophets accused; their peoples called them liars. God seized them severely, and He will do the same to the beliers of this nation.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنتُمُ الْفُقَرَاء إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿١٥﴾

(35:15) ***O people! You are the ones who are in need of Allah, and Allah is needless, praised.***

Without doubt, this verse sets the stage for the coming two verses. Still, it also stands independently.

To explain further: The context indicates that the deeds of these beliers showed that they imagined that their worship of their own gods freed them of any need for God. They deemed that, instead, God was the one who needed them! That must have been why God called them to Himself in the divine invitation, extended by His messengers. There was still needfulness and needlessness; however, [in their view], they had a share of needlessness, and God had a share of neediness (exalted be He from that!).

So God refutes what they alleged. *O people! You are the ones who are in need of Allah, and Allah is needless, praised*. He limits dependency to

them and needlessness to Himself. They have the full share of neediness, and He has the full share of needlessness. Since needlessness (*ghinā*ʾ) and neediness (*faqr*) [or independence and dependence, being rich and poor] are complete opposites, when one is present, the other must disappear, and vice versa. Thus, since God is restricting them to needfulness, and declaring Himself needless, they must be fully dependent, and He must be fully independent.

For God is existentially, essentially "rich". He can dispense with them or obliterate them. They are the ones who are existentially, essentially "poor. They cannot use others to make themselves independent of God.

The basis of God's being needless (or rich, or independent) from them, and for them being needful (or poor, or dependent) towards Him is that is that He is the one who created them and manages their affairs. The use of the word God here indicates the neediness of creation and His needlessness. The sentence If He wishes, He can erase you and come forth with a new creation and so on are means of praising Him. He is the praised in His act, which is creating and managing.

Thus, the meaning returns to what we were discussing earlier: "O people! Because you are creations, managed by God, you are completely dependent on God and in need, and because God is the creator and manager, He is independent and needs no one else."

[The following is a discussion of the implied question of whether it is wrong for the verse to limit the concept of dependency to human beings, since all of creation is dependent, not just human beings.]

Nevertheless, there is no harm in limiting dependency (*faqr*) to human beings—whether they specifically be the beliers (*mukadhdhibūn*) or whether they be all human beings—even though other creations also depend on God like them. This is because when the justification given for a principle is general, then the resulting principle is general. It is as if it is saying: "O inhabitants of creation! You are in need of your Creator and the one who manages your affairs, and He is the needless, the praised."

This objection—namely, that dependency is ascribed only to humans even though it is applicable to all—has been refuted in various ways:

(1) Limiting dependency (*faqr*) to human beings is a rhetorical device emphasizing their intense need of God. That is, they are truly poor. Other created beings or things are also dependent on God with respect to their existence. For this reason, God says: *The human being was created weak* (4:28). Here, He is not intending the jinn, because they do not need food

and clothing and the other things that human beings do.

(2) Here, both people and others are intended. However, "human beings" are mentioned because, when speaking, the listener who is present takes priority over the listener who is absent, or speaking of what is known takes priority over what is unknown.

(3) The *al-* in *al-nās* ("human beings") denotes the human species, and the al- in *al-fuqarāʾ* identifies a subgroup. This is because, in this verse, those who are being spoken to are the same as those who are being spoken about in *That* (dhalikum) *is Allah, your Lord. To him belongs all dominion* (35:13). That is, *dhalikum* refers to the one who is worshipped, and He is the one who is being described with the attributes of majesty—not those whom they call upon other than Him. And you creations are even more dependent and in need of Him!

(4) The restriction is attributed to Him is relative not absolute.

It is no secret that the import and the context of the verse do not agree with any of these explanations. Yes, possibly the latter explanation has some merit, in that it rests on an explanation that we already provided.

The end of the verse describes God as praiseworthy, indicating that He is needless and praised on account of His acts, whether He gives or refrains from giving. This is because when He gives something, He does not give it in exchange for anything else, such as gratitude; anything that appears to be in exchange for it has already been decreed. And if He withholds something, no one has any right to contest that with Him, for no one can claim true ownership over anything.

إِن يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ وَيَأْتِ بِخَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ﴿١٦﴾ وَمَا ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ بِعَزِيزٍ ﴿١٧﴾

(35:16–17) ***If He wishes, he can erase you and come forth with a new creation, and that is not difficult for Allah.***

Meaning, "O people! He can obliterate you if He wants. He has no need of you and would not be harmed in the least if he wiped you out and came up with a new creation which praised and glorified Him. He also would have no need of them. No, for He is praised. However, He has made it incumbent upon Himself to be generous, and for that He is praised. And this is not difficult for God, in all His absolute power—mighty be His name!"

It is clear that the second verse here (*and that is not difficult for Allah*) links back to the first (*if He wishes, He can erase you and come forth with a*

new creation) with respect to God being needless. *Come forth with a new creation* is a consequence of his attribute of being praiseworthy (*ḥamīd*). The meaning of these two verses together stems forth from another verse about His needlessness and mercy, namely: *And your Lord is needless, the possessor of mercy. If He wishes, He could destroy you and replace you with whoever He wills* (6:133).

وَلا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى وَإِن تَدْعُ مُثْقَلَةٌ إِلَى حِمْلِهَا لا يُحْمَلْ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَى إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلاةَ وَمَن تَزَكَّى فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّى لِنَفْسِهِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٨﴾

(35:18) ***None shall bear the burden*** **(wizr)** ***of another. If a soul weighed down by a burden were to call upon someone to carry it for them, they would not [be able to] carry a smidgen of it, even if they were near of kin. You can only warn those who fear their Lord in secret and establish the prayer, and whoever purifies himself does so for his own self. And to Allah is the return.***

al-Rāghib says:

> *Wazar* ("burden") is a mountain refuge, as in *Nay, and no refuge (*wazar*)!* (75:11). *Wizr* is a burden likened to a mountain. It is used to refer to the burden of sin in: *That they may bear their burdens completely* (16:25) and *they will bear their burdens and others' burdens* (29:13).

It means that no one can bear another person's burden of sin, and that a soul can only be taken to account for its own burden of sin that it has earned.

Some might raise a doubt about the end of the verse: When God says that, if He wills, He can obliterate people and create others, He is threatening destruction. This is because of the beliers, who are bearing the burden [of their denial]. But what about the believers? Wouldn't destroying the believers entail making the believers *also* bear the beliers' burden? [That is, it contradicts the idea that none can bear the burden of another.]

Our response: *None shall bear the burden of another* means that no soul shall bear any part of another's burden, even if that person be family.

The divine call and the warning did not benefit the beliers, who are pinpointed for destruction, for their hearts have been sealed. Warnings can

only benefit those who fear their Lord in secret and establish the prayer. The two groups are not equal, just as the blind is not like the seeing, shadows are not like the light, shade is not like heat, and life is not like death.

None shall bear the burden of another means that no person can bear another person's sins.

If a soul weighed down by a burden were to call upon someone to carry it for them, they would not [be able to] carry a smidgen of it, even if they were near of kin: Meaning, if someone were to beg someone to carry a speck of their burden of spin, that person would not respond or be able to, even if that person were a relative like a father, mother, brother, or sister.

You can only warn those who fear their Lord in secret and establish the prayer: This refers to those beliers who did not benefit from the warning and could not realize the truth of the warning because their hearts had sealed shut. [It is as if it is saying:] "You can only warn (or your warning will only benefit) those people who fear their Lord in secret and establish the prayer—the best form of worship—and consider it important. You can only warn those who wholly believe in God and worship Him. That is, your warning inspires them to fear their Lord and establish the prayer, not that they first must fear their Lord and establish the prayer, and *then* you can only warn them after that, in that the effect would necessitate the cause, as in the verse: *I see myself pressing wine* (12:36)."

Whoever purifies himself does so for his own self: Here, "fear" and "establishing the prayer" are replaced with "purification" to indicate that the desired result of the divine invitation is purification and purifying the soul, which is then adorned with fear of God in secret and establishing the prayer.

This emphasizes and confirms what preceded it—namely, that God is independent and praised. That is, God does not benefit from inviting people to purify themselves; rather, those who purify themselves do for their own good.

The verse finishes with *And to Allah is the return.* This indicates that this self-purification is not in vain, for both groups [those who did and did not purify themselves] will, without doubt, return to their Lord, and He will take them to account and recompense them; those who purified themselves will have a better recompense.

وَمَا يَسْتَوِى الأَعْمَى وَالْبَصِيرُ ﴿١٩﴾ وَلا الظُّلُمَاتُ وَلا النُّورُ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَلا الظِّلُّ

وَلَا الْحَرُورُ ﴿٢١﴾

(35:19–21) ***And the blind and the seeing are not alike, nor the darkness and the light, nor the shade and the heat.***

This comes across as a continuation of the previous sentence (*and to Allah is the return*), explaining through metaphor how the two groups—those who purify themselves and those who belied the truth—are not the same. Some exegetes also say that it is linked to *and the two seas are not alike* (35:12).

Nor the darkness* (lit. darknesses) *and the light: *Nor* (*lā*) is repeated in this and the subsequent verses to emphasis "no!"

***Nor the shade and the heat* (ḥarūr):** *Ḥarūr* is said to mean: (a) "intense heat of the sun", (b) "a hot wind", and (c) "a hot wind which blows during the day, and heat persisting day and night".

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَحْيَاءُ وَلَا الْأَمْوَاتُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُسْمِعُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَمَا أَنتَ بِمُسْمِعٍ مَّن فِي الْقُبُورِ ﴿٢٢﴾

(35:22) ***And the living and the dead are not alike. Allah makes whoever He wishes hear, and you cannot make those in the grave hear.***

This is linked to *and the blind and the seeing are not alike*. Rather than just saying "nor the living and the dead", "they are not alike" (*mā yastawī*) is repeated to prevent the listener from forgetting the initial verb, since it is the fourth item in the sequence. This is similar to the repetition of *how* (kayf) in: *How can there be an agreement between Allah and His Messenger, and the polytheists… and how, if they prevail against you* (9:7–8) [that is, due to the lengthy intermittent text].

These four verses (*the blind and the seeing* up to *the living and the dead* [19–22]) are metaphors for believers and those who reject the truth, and the consequences of their deeds.

Allah makes whoever He wishes hear: This refers to the faithful whom God has enlivened. He has made their souls listen in preparation for that: *Or whoever was dead, and We enlivened him and made him a light…* (6:122). As for the Prophet, he is a means [to God]; guidance is God's.

You cannot make those in the grave hear: Meaning, the dead; here,

"the dead" refers to those who rejected the truth (the *kāfir*) whose hearts are sealed.

إِنْ أَنتَ إِلاَّ نَذِيرٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

(35:23) ***You are naught but a warner.***

This implies that he [the Prophet] can do no more. That is, "You can only warn them. If any of them are guided or misguided—and the misguided suffer the recompense of their evil deeds—this is in the hands of God."

Although the Prophet is usually referred to as both a bearer of glad tidings (*bashīr*) and a warner (*nadhīr*), this says *warner* because that is his role being discussed here; both descriptions are used for him in the next verse.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِن مِّنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلاَّ خَلا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

(35:24) ***We have sent you with truth as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner. Every people who came before had a warner pass through them.***

Meaning, "We have sent you to give glad tidings and warnings. This is nothing strange or new; all peoples who lived before had warners among them. This is the practice of God with His creation."

The context of the verse indicates that warner (*nadhīr*) means "messenger appointed by God (*rasūl mabʿūth min ʿind Allāh*)". Some exegetes consider warner (*nadhīr*) to refer to anyone—whether prophet or simply a knowledgeable person—who comes forth preaching and warning. However, this is against the apparent meaning of the verse.

However, it is not necessary for all the peoples of the past to have had a warner who was actually one of them [as opposed to a member of a different nation or tribe, such as the ancient prophets who travelled]. God says "passed through them" (*khalā fīhā*), not "from them" (*khalā minhā*).

وَإِن يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَبِالزُّبُرِ وَبِالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ ﴿٢٥﴾

(35:25) ***If they call you a liar, those before you also called [the messengers] liars. Their messengers came to them with clear***

***arguments* (bayyināt) *and the Psalms* (zubur) *and with the illuminating book* (kitābun munīr).**

Bayyināt are the *āyāt* (miraculous signs or verses) which bear witness to the messengers' truth. *Zubur* is the plural of *zabūr* and—in that it is juxtaposed with book—may refer to scrolls and scriptures in which God is celebrated but which do not contain statutes for ritual law. *Kitābun munīr* refers to a divinely revealed book containing ritual law, like the books revealed to Noah and Abraham, the Torah of Moses, and the Gospel of Jesus. The meaning of the verse is clear.

ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿٢٦﴾

(35:26) *Then I seized those who rejected [the truth], and how [intense] was the disavowal* (nakīr)*!*

"Seized" is a metaphor for "punished". *Nakīr* means *inkār* ("denial", "disavowal", "negation"). The remainder of the verse is clear.

On the General Meaning of Warning (*indhār*)

In our discussions on prophethood (volume 2, Arabic) and in the stories of Noah (volume 10, Arabic), we presented intellectual proof for sending prophets to the masses; scriptural evidence supports this.

No human nation was ever deprived of a warner who provided the true prophetic call. However, not every prophet actually had to hail from that nation; there is no evidence for that. *Every people who came before had a warner pass through them* (35:23) supports that.

As for how the warning was delivered: in theory, the calls of the prophets had to affect each and every member of the societies they were in. None could be left who had not heard the call. In practice, however, in the material world, various causes and effects stand in the way, such that some may not have comprehended the call. This is like other universal effects that the creation has destined. For example, potentially every child should live a natural life, in most cases certain events would not prevent that from happening. A similar example is with respect to whether human beings leave behind descendants: while humans are designed with the theoretical capacity to generate, in practice, there are exceptions, such as people who die prematurely, before leaving behind survivors.

Thus, while it is necessary that prophethood and warnings came to all

peoples, it is not necessary that each and every member of these societies was guided directly or indirectly by the prophet. It may happen that it does not reach some people due to causes which prevent them from receiving the message. Therefore, anyone who is addressed by the message and received the call—directly or indirectly—has received the proof, and anyone who is addressed by the message but has not received it, the proof is not completed for them and they are from those mentioned in the Qur'an as the "weak" and their destiny is with God: *Except for the weak—men, women, and children—who have no means and cannot find a way* (4:98).

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, regarding *none shall bear the burden of another* (35:18), Aḥmad and Tirmidhī relate—and al-Nasāʾī and Ibn Mājah consider it authentic—from ʿAmr ibn al-Aḥwaṣ:
The Messenger of God said at the farewell hajj: "A criminal reaps what he sows. A father shall not be punished for his son's crime, nor will a son be punished for his father's crime."

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says regarding *And the living and the dead are not alike. Allah makes whoever He wishes hear, and you cannot make those in the grave hear* (35:22):
These are those who rejected the truth (the *kuffār*); they do not hear you just as the inhabitants of the graves do not hear you.

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, in the hadith of Abū Sahl al-Sirrī ibn Sahl al-Jandīsābūrī al-Khāmis related from ʿAbd al-Quddūs from Abū Ṣāliḥ, it is narrated that Ibn ʿAbbās said regarding *you cannot make the dead hear* (27:80) and *you cannot make those in the grave hear* (35:22):
The Prophet was standing before the slain on the day of Badr and saying, "Have you found what your Lord promised you to be true? O so-and-so, son of so-and-so, did you not deny your Lord? Did you not call His prophet a liar? Did you not cut off your kinsman?"
They [the people] said, "O Messenger of God! Do they hear what you are saying?"
He said: "You do not hear what I am saying better than they do!"
So God revealed the verse *You cannot make the dead hear, and you cannot make those in the grave hear* as a metaphor for those who rejected truth (the *kuffār*); they heard not his words.

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Author's comment: This narration has clear indications of fabrication, for the position of the Prophet is higher than for him to speak of something that he had no knowledge of from his Lord and for God to then to send him a verse refuting him and telling him what was correct.

Furthermore, the way the verse is presented does not match what is in the codex of the Qur'an, since part of it is taken from Sūrah al-Naml, verse 80, and the other part from Sūrah al-Fāṭir, verse 22. Additionally, the context of the verse indicates it is Meccan [whereas the Battle of Badr happened after the Prophet had migrated to Medina].

(4) In *al-Iḥtijāj*, it is related in the discussion with Imām al-Ṣādiq:
A questioner requested, "Tell me about the Zoroastrians (*Majūs*). Was a prophet sent to them? For I have found that they have a coherent book with eloquent preaching and exemplary examples. They believe in divine reward and punishment, and have a religious law that they enact."
He [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said: *Every people who came before had a warner pass through them* (35:24). God appointed a prophet for them with a book, but they renounced it and disavowed it.

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Verses 27–38

These verses embark upon a new argument for and other signs of God's oneness. The book—that it is the truth and has been sent down from God—is also recounted here. Since, in the previous section, the focus of the discussion was on prophethood and the book—for instance, *We have sent you with truth as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner* (35:24) and *Their messengers came to them with clear arguments and the Psalms and with the illuminating book* (35:25)—it is an appropriate place to present some of the effects and specifics of the book.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُّخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا
وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بِيضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ ﴿٢٧﴾

(35:27) ***Do you not see that Allah sends from the sky water, and We bring forth with it fruits of various colors? And in the mountains streaks of white and red, of various colors, and intensely black?***

This is another proof of the oneness of God. Namely, that God sends rain from the sky, which is the most significant agent in growing fruits. If all of them were solely dependent on this single agent, all of them would be the same color; therefore, the variety of colors is a sign of the divine hand.

Some say that the variety of colors hinges on the various agents affecting them, such as the different factors found inside a species. This can be refuted by saying that all of them are composed of the same type of physical matter; therefore, the root of the difference between them must lie in a metaphysical agent which controls them and directs them towards different ends.

The apparent meaning of the "various colors of fruits" is the actual variance in colors, which concord with other differences between them in taste, fragrance, and other properties. Some say that "various colors" refers to different types of fruit, as the expression is sometimes used for fruit or foodstuffs of different types—for instance, one can say metaphorically, "So-and-so offered 'colors' of food and fruit". Similarly, the verse

speaks of *and in the mountains, streaks of red and white.* However, the first view is stronger.

And We bring forth with it fruits of various colors: There is a shift here from third-person to first-person ["God does" to "We do"]. Some exegetes say that this is to draw attention to the action, in that it reflects God's power and wisdom in fashioning things from anew. Similar examples are found in: *We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of glad tidings and as warner* (35:24) and *Then I seized those who rejected [the truth], and how [intense] was the disavowal!* (35:26) Perhaps it indicates that the matter is directly between them and God without anyone standing between them to intercede for them, assist them, or save them from torment.

And in the mountains streaks* (judad) *of whites* (bīḍ) *and reds* (ḥumr), *of various colors, and intensely black* (gharābīb sūd)*? *Judad* is the plural of *juddah*, meaning "a path" or "a road". *Bīḍ* and *ḥumr* are plural forms of *abyaḍ* ("white") and *aḥmar* ("red"). According to the apparent meaning of the verse, *of various colors* refers to the streaks (or pathways) in the mountains, and colors acts as a type of subject for various. [That is, if it were a sentence, it would read "the colors vary".] However, if it were a subject-predicate sentence, it would say *mukhtalifah alwānuhā* (in the feminine). *Gharābīb* is the plural of *gharbīb*, meaning "an intense black". The word "crow" (*ghurāb*) comes from the same root. *Sūd* also means "black" and either reiterates or specifies the meaning of *gharābīb*.

It means, "Do you not see pathways of white, red, and black—of different colors—in the mountains?" The intent behind "pathways" is either real roads that are walked upon, or else the streaks that stretch along the faces of the mountains themselves, in white, red, and black, of different colors.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالدَّوَابِّ وَالأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ
مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاء إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

(35:28) ***And of mankind, beasts, and cattle there are those of diverse colors, likewise* (kadhalik). *Only those of His servants who know* (min ʿibādihi al-ʿulamāʾ) *fear Allah. Allah is mighty, forgiving.***

This is referring to people, land-animals, and quadrupeds, such as camels, sheep, and cows. They are also of different colors, and white, red, and black, just like fruits and mountains vary in their colors.

Regarding *likewise* (kadhalik), some exegetes say that it is part of a subject-predicate sentence with an elided subject referring to all of the aforementioned things (such as the varieties of fruit, mountains, people, animals, and quadrupeds). Other exegetes say that it hinges on *fear* in *those of His servants who know fear Allah*, meaning that the ones who fear God are those who of His servants who consider His signs such as the fruits, mountains, etc.; however, both the wording and meaning of this view are farfetched.

Only those of His servants who know fear Allah: This resumes the discussion and clarifies that reflecting on these divine signs affects the soul and results in true faith in and reverence towards God, in all meanings of the sense, among those who have knowledge, as opposed to those who are ignorant. It was mentioned previously that warnings shall be effective for them: *You can only warn those who fear their Lord in secret and establish the prayer* (35:18). Therefore, this verse clarifies what is meant there, and that true reverence towards God is found among those with knowledge.

ʿUlamāʾ ("those who know") here refers to those who have knowledge of God. They are the ones with a deep understanding of God through His names, attributes, and acts. It is a complete understanding which makes their hearts certain and removes any splotch of doubt or disquietude from themselves. The effects of this are seen in their deeds, for their deeds match their words. *Fear* refers to true reverence and is followed by inner and outer humility.

This is what the context of the verses indicates.

Allah is mighty, forgiving: This wraps up the verse with an explanation—His might is such that he is perpetually victorious and never overpowered. None can overthrow Him! Those with true knowledge fear and revere Him from every angle. And because He is forgiving—that is, one who often forgives sins and slips—they believe in Him, come close to Him, and desire to meet Him.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً يَرْجُونَ تِجَارَةً لَّن تَبُورَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(35:29) ***Those who recite the book of Allah*** **(yatlūna kitāb Allāh)** ***and establish the prayer and spend of what We have provided them secretly and openly, hoping for an exchange that will never perish.***

"Reciting the book" (*yatlūn* or *tilāwah*) refers to reciting the Qur'an, an act which God has praised. "Establishing the prayer" meanings performing it consistently and not letting it slide. "Spending of sustenance secretly and openly" refers to giving of wealth in secret to prevent showing-off and losing sincerity when giving the charitable gifts encouraged but not obligated by the Sunnah. Giving money openly is done to encourage others and refers to the mandatory charitable contributions [like *zakāt* and *khums*].

Hoping for an exchange that will never perish: Meaning, that will never be destroyed. Some exegetes say that *hoping for an exchange will never perish* is the predicate of a sentence beginning with *inna* at the beginning of the verse. Other exegetes say it is the predicate of *that He may pay them their rewards in full* (yuwaffihīm) [in the next verse], meaning that this is why they do what they do.

لِيُوَفِّيَهُمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِ إِنَّهُ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ ﴿٣٠﴾

(35:30) ***That He may pay them their rewards in full and increase them in His bounty. He is forgiving, gracious.***

This clause is the consequence of *they recite* and other things appended to it in the previous verse—meaning, "They do what they do before they will be recompensed completely and fully with the good reward for their deeds."

And increase them in His bounty: Possibly, "increase" here refers to the multiplying of good deeds, as in: *Whoever comes with a good deed shall have tenfold of its like* (6:106) and *The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is the example of a seed from which seven ears of grain sprout; on each ear of grain are a hundred seeds. Allah multiplies for whom He wills!* (2:216) It is also possible that something other than the multiplying of divine reward is meant, as in: *In it [heaven], they shall have whatever they want, and with Us is more.* (50:35)

He is forgiving, gracious: This wraps up the verse of an explanation of why it is so: it is because God is innately forgiving; He forgives their slips. It is also because God is innately appreciative (*shakūr*) and hence rewards them and sends them more blessings from Himself.

وَالَّذِى أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ هُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِعِبَادِهِ لَخَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٣١﴾

(35:31) ***That which We revealed to you of the book is the truth* (huwa al-ḥaqq)*, confirming what is in your hands. Allah is aware of His servants, seeing.***

The pronoun *huwa* ("it", "he", omitted in translation) reiterates the subject before proceeding to the next part of the sentence. The *al-* in *is the truth* (huwa al-ḥaqq) is for emphasis, not restriction; meaning that it is truth untarnished by falsehood [not that it is the only truth].

ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ وَمِنْهُم مُّقْتَصِدٌ وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٣٢﴾

(35:32) ***Then we gave the book as an inheritance to those of our servants whom We chose. Among them is the one who wrongs his own soul, and among them is the one who takes a middle course, and among them is the one who is foremost in acts of good by the permission of Allah. This is a high grace.***

It is said: *Awrathahu mālan* ("giving someone something in inheritance") refers to a situation where someone owns something, can make use of it as he likes, and then leaves it to someone to make use of after him. Similar are inheritance of knowledge, position, and related things; the person who used them before leaves them to others to use. So "giving a book in inheritance to a group of people" means handing it over to them for them to pass down over generations and to benefit from.

This model is correct, even if the one who takes it up after them is a group, but not all of them. God says:

> *And we gave Moses the guidance and had the Israelites inherit the book after him as a guidance and remembrance to those who think.* (40:54)
>
> *We sent down the Torah. In it is guidance and a light by which the prophets—those who submitted—pass judgments for the Jews, as did the rabbis and the scholars—with respect to what they have been entrusted with of the book of Allah.* (5:44)
>
> *Those who inherited the book after them were in wavering doubt about it.* (42:14)

So the Israelites inherited the book, even though only some of them

upheld its strictures and gave it its just due.

Book (*kitāb*), according to the context here, refers to the Holy Qur'an. How is this so? The previous verse—*that which We revealed to you of the book (*al-kitāb*) is the truth* (35:31)—specifies it. The *al-* in *al-kitāb* refers to a specific book, not books in general, so do not pay any regard to those who say that the *al-* is for type, and that *book* refers to all heavenly books sent to the prophets.

Choosing (al-iṣṭifāʾ) means "selecting" and is close in meaning to *ikhtiyār* (also "choosing", "selecting"). The difference is that *ikhtiyār* refers to selecting the best item from many, whereas *al-iṣṭifāʾ* refers to selecting the choicest and purest item.

***Of our servants* (min ʿibādinā):** The *min* here may offer further explanation, specify the beginning of a range [as in when someone says "from one to ten people"], or specify the selection of one or some from many [as in "one of the three people"]. At first glance, it seems to provide further necessary explanation, as in: *And peace be upon His servants whom He chose* (27:59).

Exegetes differ regarding who these chosen servants are. Some say they are the prophets. Some say they are the Israelites, citing the verse: *Allah chose Adam and Noah and the family of Abraham and the family of ʿImrān above all nations* (3:33). Some say that they are the nation of Muḥammad, because they inherited the Qur'an from their prophet, and their scholars benefit from it directly, without any intermediary. And some say that it is the scholars of the Muslims.

Some say—and this is reinforced by many well-sourced (*mustafiḍah*) narrations from Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq—that those who are intended are the descendants of the Prophet through Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ, who are included in the family of Abraham—that is, the verse *Allah chose Adam and Noah and the family of Abraham…* (3:33). This is because of their knowledge of the Qur'an and that they are inseparable from it, as reflected in the highly-narrated (*mutawātir*), agreed-upon narration: "I am leaving behind among you the two weighty things, the book of God and my descendants, the people of my house. They shall not separate until they are brought back to the fount [in Paradise]."

With that in mind, the meaning is that "We revealed you the Qur'an"—because the word *thumma* ("then", which introduces the verse) conveys the meaning of a delay in sequence—"and had your offspring inherit it. They are the ones whom We chose from among our servants when We chose

the family of Abraham." Adding *our* to *servants* (ʿibād) expresses honor.

Among them is the one who wrongs his own soul, and among them is the one who takes a middle course, and among them is the one who is foremost in acts of good by the permission of Allah: Possibly, the pronoun *them* in *among them* (minhum) refers to *those whom We chose*. Thus, those who shared in the inheritance fall into three groups: those who wrong their souls, the moderate, and those who are foremost in good deeds. A true inheritor who knows the book and protects it is foremost in good deeds.

It is also possible that the pronoun *them* refers to *our servants*. In this case, adding *our* is not just honorary. Rather, *and among them* is explanatory. It means, "We have given the book as an inheritance to some of our servants—the chosen ones, not all of them, for among our servants are those who wrong themselves, and among them are those who take a middle course, and among them are those who are foremost. Not all of them are suitable for this inheritance."

The first interpretation is supported by the fact that nothing prevents the inheritance from going to the entire group, even though only some of them can actually carry it. Something similar is found in the verse: *And we had the Israelites inherit the book* (40:54).

The differentiation in the verse between "those who wrong their own souls", "those who follow a middle course", and "those who are foremost" gives the sense that "those who wrong their own souls" commit some misdeeds. This refers to Muslims who have the Qur'an, in that they were chosen to bear it. "Those who follow a middle course" are in the middle. "The foremost in good" are those who—by the permission of God—outstrip the wrongdoer or middling person in levels of nearness [to God], and this refers to the Imam or others through the permission of God, because they are doing good, as in the verse: *And the foremost, the foremost; they are the near ones* (56:11).

This is a high grace: Meaning, the inheritance is a high grace from God and not something that people earn by their own hands.

This is what the context indicates; narrations support this interpretation. However, exegetes have differed extraordinarily over the details of this verse:

(1) *Then* (thumma): Some say it denotes sequence in narrating; some say it is for sequence in rank; and some say it denotes sequence in time. Then they disagree over whether it is appended to *We revealed* or *which We revealed*.

(2) *We gave the book as an inheritance*: Some say that its meaning is as it appears to be. Others say that it means "We judged regarding the inheritance and allocated it."

(3) *The book*: Some say it is the Qur'an. Other say it refers to all divinely revealed books.

(4) *Those whom We chose*: Some say it refers to the prophets. Other say it refers to the Israelites. Still others say it refers to the nation (*ummah*) of Muḥammad or the scholars of the nation of Muḥammad. Others say it refers to the descendants of the Prophet via Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ.

(5) *Of our servants* (min ʿibādinā): Some say that *min* means "a portion of them". Other say it expresses the beginning of a range, or is for clarification.

(6) *Servants*: The understanding of the intended meaning behind servants varies in accordance with how *min* is understood.

(7) *Our* (in *Our servants*): Some say that *Our* is an honorific; others say that it is not.

(8) *Among them* (minhum): Some say that *them* goes back to *those*; others say that it refers to *Our servants*.

(9) *The one who wrongs his own soul, and among them is the one who takes a middle course, and among the is the one who is foremost in acts of good*: Some say that *the one who wrongs his own soul* is the one who acts better in public than in private (or whose outer self is better than his inner self); *the one who takes a middle course* is the one whose outer and inner selves are the same; and the *foremost* is the one whose inner self is better than his outer self. Some say that the *foremost* are the companions in the time of the Prophet, *the one who takes a middle course* refers to the first generation after him, and *the one who wrongs his own soul* refers to everyone else. Some say that *the one who wrongs his own soul* refers to a person immersed in misdeeds; *the one who takes a middle course* is moderate; and the *foremost* are the nearest to God in rank.

There are other views which we have omitted. Were we to consider all of them, we would get into the thousands!

جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا ۖ وَلِبَاسُهُمْ فِيهَا حَرِيرٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

(35:33) *Gardens of Eden, which they shall enter, adorned* (yuḥallawn) *therein with bracelets* (asāwir) *of gold and pearl,*

and their raiment shall be of silk.

Yuḥallawn (from *taḥliyyah*) means "ornamented", "adorned". *Asāwir* ("bracelets" or "sets of bracelets") is the plural of *aswirah*, which is the plural of *siwār*. Al-Rāghib says:

> "A woman's *siwār* is an Arabicization of the [Persian] word *dastwārah*."

This verse comes across as an elaboration upon *high grace*. *Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:*

> This is an explanation of *grace*, as if someone were to ask, "What is that grace?" So it replies, "It is gardens, or the recompense of gardens, or entering gardens. It might be an equivalent phrase for *grace* (faḍl), as if it is saying, "That is entering gardens."

The remainder of it is clear.

وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزَنَ ۖ إِنَّ رَبَّنَا لَغَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

(35:34) ***And they will say, "Praise be to Allah, who took away sadness from us. Our Lord is forgiving, gracious."***

Some exegetes say that the *sadness* refers to the grief that shadows people due to the trials of life, and that it is removed when they enter heaven; thus, they are praising God for the removal of that grief.

There is also a view that *sadness* refers to a sadness that befalls them after they pass away. It is also said that they are still troubled by the touch of their misdeeds when they enter the eternal garden [and then it is removed]. However, this would be for the person who "wrongs his own soul" or the "one who takes a middle course"; those who are foremost in good deeds do not have evils in their book of deeds to suffer for.

This view most closely matches what they say: *Our Lord is forgiving, gracious.*

الَّذِي أَحَلَّنَا دَارَ الْمُقَامَةِ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ لَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

(35:35) ***Who, out of His bounty, has caused us to dwell in the eternal abode*** **(dār al-muqāmah).** ***No toil*** **(naṣab)** ***or weariness*** **(lughūb)** ***shall touch us therein.***

Muqāmah means "staying". An *eternal abode* is one which someone does not leave and which will not change.

Naṣab means "exhaustion" and "hardship". *Lughūb* means "helplessness" and "exhaustion in seeking to earn a living".

It means, "Here, in this eternal abode, we will experience two conditions as a gift of God from His grace, although we do not deserve them. Neither toil nor exhaustion shall touch us here—that is, in the garden, and neither helplessness nor fatigue shall afflict us when seeking what we want, for, in it, we shall have whatever we desire."

Out of His bounty: This is particularly appropriate given what was said previously: *This is a high grace* (35:32).

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يُقْضَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ فَيَمُوتُوا وَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِهَا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي كُلَّ كَفُورٍ ﴿٣٦﴾

(35:36) ***And those who reject [truth] shall have the fire of hell. Their term in it shall be endless—they shall neither die nor will the punishment be lightened for them. Thus do We recompense every ungrateful one.***

The *l-* in *lahum* ("they shall have") indicates that the fire is a recompense for them and shall not be separated from them; it is theirs. *They shall neither die* means, "They will not die from the severe punishment; rather, they shall subsist in it. It shall not be lightened for them. Thus do We recompose the strongly ungrateful."

وَهُمْ يَصْطَرِخُونَ فِيهَا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ ۚ أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُمْ مَا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَنْ تَذَكَّرَ وَجَاءَكُمُ النَّذِيرُ ۖ فَذُوقُوا فَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ نَصِيرٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

(35:37) ***And they shall cry*** **(yaṣṭarikhūn)** ***therein for succor. "Our Lord! Let us out, that We may work righteous deeds, other than what we did before." Did We not make your life long enough for whoever might reflect in it to reflect? And the warner came to you. So taste [this]; the unjust shall have no helper.***

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

Iṣṭirākh (that is, *yaṣṭarikhūn*) is a cry or call for help. It is from

the verb form *iftiʿāl* [form 8].

Our Lord! Let us out…: This provides further explanation for "crying therein for succor". *Did we not make your life long enough?* is the reply to their plea. *Taste [this]* and *the unjust shall have no helper* both relate back to what came before.

It means, "Those ungrateful people who denied the truth who are calling out for help in the fire are saying, 'O Lord! Take us out from the fire so that we might work righteous deeds, not the evil which we used to work.' And they will receive the reply, 'No! Did We not keep you alive long enough so that whoever would take heed, would take heed? Didn't a warner come to you and warn you about punishment, but you neither heeded that nor believed? So taste the punishment; the wrongdoers will have no one to save them from it.'"

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَالِمُ غَيْبِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٣٨﴾

(35:38) ***Allah knows what is hidden in the heavens and the earth, and He knows what is in the hearts.***

Therefore, He will treat them in accordance with their inner selves—their beliefs and the effects of their deeds. He will call them to account for that, whether or not their outsides match their insides. God says: *Whether you reveal or hide what is inside yourselves, Allah will take you to account for it* (2:248) and *On the day when secrets will be laid bare* (86:9).

Examining Narrations

(1) Regarding *only those of His servants who know fear Allah* (35:28), *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:

It is narrated that Imām al-Ṣādiq said: "*Those who know* (ʿulamāʾ) are those whose deeds match their words. A person whose deeds do not match his words does not have true knowledge (that is, is not an *ʿālim*)."

And in a hadith, it says that the more knowledgeable they are of God, the more they fear God.

Author's comments: In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, there is a narration with a similar meaning narrated via Abū Ḥamzah from ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn [Imām al-Sajjād].

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Ibn Abī Shaybah, al-Tirmidhī, and al-Ḥākim that [Imām] al-Ḥasan said that the

Messenger of God said:

Knowledge is of two types: knowledge in the heart, and that is beneficial knowledge (*ʿilm nāfiʿ*), and knowledge which is on the tongue, and that is the proof of God upon His creation.

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Ibn Masʿūd relates that the Prophet said regarding *increase them in His bounty* (35:30):

This is intercession for whoever deserves hellfire by someone whom he did good to in this world.

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related that Aḥmad ibn ʿUmar said:

I asked Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā about the verse *Then we gave the book as an inheritance to those of our servants whom We chose.* (35:32)

He said, "These are the children of Fāṭimah. *The one who is foremost in acts of good* is the imam, *the one who takes a middle course* is the one who knows and acknowledges the imam, and *the one who wrongs his own soul* is the one who does not know the imam."

(5) In *Saʿd al-Suʿūd* by Ibn Ṭāwūs, Abū Isḥāq al-Sabīʿī relates in a narration from Imām al-Bāqir about this verse:

It is specifically about us. O Abū Isḥāq! *The one who is foremost in acts of good* is ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalib, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, and the martyr from us [Imām al-Bāqir]. *The one who takes a middle course* is the one who fasts during the day and stands [in prayer] at night. *The one who wrongs his own soul* refers to the common folk with human failings, and who are forgiven.

Author's comment: Other narrations indicate that "the martyr from us" refers to the Imam.

(6) In *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*, regarding this verse, it is related via a chain of narration that Imām al-Ṣādiq said:

The one who wrongs his own soul hovers (*yaḥūm*) around his own self; *the one who takes a middle course* flutters around to his heart; and *the one who is foremost in good deeds* soars to his Lord.

Author's comment: *Yaḥūm* means "to circle around". *The one who wrongs his own soul* circles around his own self, following his own desires. He puts his effort into attaining what pleases him. *The one who takes a middle course* circles around his own heart, busying himself with purifying his heart through abstention and worship. *The foremost in good* circles around his Lord, sincerely devoted to Him, remembering Him and forgetting everything else. He seeks Him and nothing else.

Know that there are very many Shiʿi narrations from the Imams of the family of the Prophet specifying that this group [*the foremost in good*] are the descendants of Fāṭimah.

(7) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from al-Fāryābī, Aḥmad, ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mundhir, and Ibn Abī Ḥatim, and al-Ṭabarānī, al-Ḥākim, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī that Abū Dardāʾ said:

I heard the Messenger of God saying: "God, the Exalted, said: *Then we gave the book as an inheritance to those of our servants whom We chose. Among them is the one who wrongs his own soul, and among them is the one who takes a middle course, and among the is the one who is foremost in acts of good by the permission of Allah* (35:32). Those who are foremost are those who enter heaven with no accounting. Those who take a middle course are those who are taken to account lightly, and those who wrong their own souls are held long for their accounting on the plains of resurrection. They are the ones who will encounter God from the angle of His mercy and who will say, '*Praise be to Allah, who took away sadness from us. Our Lord is forgiving, gracious, who, out of His bounty, has caused us to dwell in the eternal abode. No toil or weariness shall touch us therein*' (35:34–35)."

Author's comments: This narration is also in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, related from Abū Dardāʾ from the Prophet. There are other narrations with the same meaning. However, there are also others that contradict it, and which should not be disregarded. For instance, it is related from Ibn Mardawayh that ʿUmar said that the Prophet said that *the one who wrongs his own soul* is the one who rejects God (the *kāfir*).

(8) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *no toil (*naṣab*) or weariness (*lughūb*) shall touch us therein* (35:35), it says:

Naṣab means "hardship", and *lughūb* means "sluggishness" and "weariness".

(9) In *Nahj al-Balāghah*, it says: The lifespan that God excuses the son of Adam [from his mistakes] for is 60 years.

Author's comments: This is also narrated from him [Imām ʿAlī] in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, as well as in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, from Ibn Jarīr, from him [Imām ʿAlī].

(10) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in *Nawādir al-Uṣūl*, al-Bayhaqī in his *Sunan*, and Ibn Jarīr, Ibn

> Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ṭabarāni, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī in *Shuʿb al-Īmān* from Ibn ʿAbbās that the Prophet said:
>
> When it is the Day of Judgment, it shall be asked, "Where are those who were 60?", and they are those whose lifespan were lengthened, about whom God said: *Did We not make your life long enough for whoever might reflect in it to reflect* (35:37)*?*

Author's comments: This is related from the Prophet via other chains of narration from Sahl ibn Saʿd and Abu Hūrayrah.

(11) *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:

> It is said that this [verse, that is, 35:37] is a reproval to a youth of 18 years old, and this is narrated from [Imām] al-Bāqir.

Author's comment: This is also narrated in *al-Faqīh* from him but without specifying precisely which Imam it was related from.

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Verses 39–45

This is a polemic over the oneness of lordship, as in *He is the one who has made you successors on the earth…* (35:39) and *Allah upholds the heavens and the earth lest they cease to be…* (35:41), and a denial that any partners have lordship, as in *Say: "Have you considered your partners whom you call upon other than Allah?..."* (35:40). It is also a reproval and threat to them for breaching what they settled on and for plotting evil.

Then it sets into words that nothing is difficult for God. He grants these wrongdoers respite for a fixed term. Then, when their time comes, He will recompense them for what they deserve. With that, the chapter concludes.

هُوَ الَّذِى جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَٰٓئِفَ فِى الْأَرْضِ فَمَن كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُۥ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَٰفِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَّا مَقْتًا وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَٰفِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا خَسَارًا ﴿٣٩﴾

(35:39) ***He is the one who has made you successors* (khalāʾif)** ***on the earth. So whoever disbelieves, his disbelief is to his detriment. Their disbelief increases the disbelievers with their Lord in naught but hatred, and their disbelief increases the disbelievers in naught but loss.***

Khalāʾif is the plural of *khalīfah* ("successor", "caliph"). When it says that people are *khalāʾif* on the earth, it means that each of them has the responsibility and authority of the previous generations to make use of and benefit from the earth as the previous generations did. They attained this position of successorship due to the way they were created—namely, with the faculty of generation—and this faculty of generation divides people into past and future.

Placing people in authority over the earth is a means of managing the creation, not of ceding this authority from Himself. Therefore, it is used as an argument for the oneness of God's lordship, for it is a quality specific to Him; there is no place to attribute it to another.

He is the one who has made you successors on the earth: It is an argument for His oneness in lordship and the absence of any partners.

His decision was to make them earthly successors in the human world; however, He is their Lord who manages their affairs, and just because He made them the successors does not mean that He has delegated this function away from Himself. For the creator of the human is the Lord of the human. And the creator is God—exalted be He—even in the face of His adversaries. So He is the Lord of the human.

So whoever disbelieves, his disbelief is to his detriment: This means that God is the Lord of the human Whoever denies that and conceals that truth and attributes lordship to someone else will suffer the harm of his own doings.

Their disbelief increases the disbelievers with their Lord in naught but hatred* (maqt), *and their disbelief increases the disbelievers in naught but loss: This explains that their denial is upon them. Their denial only results in odium and severe distaste (*maqt*) before their Lord. For, in their denial, they are turning away from serving Him and mocking the divine honor. Loss shall be bequeathed to them, for they traded human happiness for misery and unwholesomeness which shall befall them as they transverse their way to the abode of recompense.

The word "increases" is used for the effect of *kufr* ("disbelief", "denial") because human nature is simple and straightforward, desirous of attaining perfection and increase. When a human being submits to God, he increases in perfection and nearness to God; and if he denies God, he increases in dislike by God and loss.

Hatred is conditioned by *with their Lord*, rather than *loss*, because loss is one of the natural consequences of exchanging faith for denial, and happiness for misery. It is a matter pertaining to themselves. However, *hatred* refers to the perspective of God.

Love and hate are both attributed to God. They are attributes of act (*ṣifāt al-afʿāl*). Both of them are external to His essence; that is, they do not actually exist in Him. When it says that God loves someone, it means that He spreads His mercy over him and enwraps that person in His mercy. When it says that God hates someone, it means that He restricts His mercy from that person and distances it from that person.

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ شُرَكَاءَكُمُ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقُوا
مِنَ الْأَرْضِ أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ أَمْ آتَيْنَاهُمْ كِتَابًا فَهُمْ عَلَى بَيِّنَةٍ
مِّنْهُ بَلْ إِن يَعِدُ الظَّالِمُونَ بَعْضُهُم بَعْضًا إِلَّا غُرُورًا ﴿٤٠﴾

(39:40) ***Say: "Have you considered your partners whom you call upon other than Allah? Show me what part of earth they have created. Or do they have share of the heavens? Or have We given them a book, and thus they follow clear guidance in it? Nay, the wrongdoers promise one another naught but delusion."***

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The partners are described figuratively as "theirs" [rather than as "God's"] because they are the ones who are claiming that they are partners to God.

In this verse, the Prophet is instructed to present this argument as to why their demigods that they worshipped are not lords. He is instructed to present this argument to them—that were there deities other than God, they would have a hand in the management of the universe and would be creating what they manage, for creation and management are inseparable. Were they creators, there would be evidence for it, either in the physical universe, or from God [that is, revelation]. However, there is no trace of their hand in creating the physical universe whatsoever or anything even remotely suggesting a sort of sharing in that capacity. Thus, the verse says: *Show me what part of the earth they have created. Or do they have a share in the heavens?*

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As for what comes from God, if this were the case, a divine book would have been revealed from Him confessing to their lordship and permitting people to worship them and take them as gods. However, no such book has been revealed—and they admit this. *Or have We given them a book, and thus they follow clear guidance in it?*

It speaks of them not creating any part of the earth (*Show me what part of the earth they have created*) rather than saying they lack any share or partnership (*shirk*) in the earth, whereas it uses the word *shirk* ("share", "partnership") with respect to the heavens (*Or do they have a share in the heavens*?) and does not say that they did not *create* any part of the heavens.

Perhaps, the point here is as follows. By "earth"—according to its usage in this argument—is meant the physical world and everything upon it, whereas by "heavens" is meant the heavenly realms and all that are in them. When it says *what part of the earth you created*, it means, "Do they have a share in the earth even though they did not create any of it?" And when it says *do they have a share in the heavens?*, it means, "What part of the heavens did they create?" It is sufficient to mention "creating" once with respect to the earth to indicate sharing in lordship, for this can only

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be done through the act of creation.

Or have We given them a book, and thus they follow clear guidance in it? Meaning, "Have We given them a book which they follow clear guidance from?" That is, "Does this book give them clear proofs that We have partners and thus does it offer proofs that there are partners to God?"

It says *Have We given them a book?* rather than "Do they have a book?" or something similar to emphasise that the answer is "no". If it had said "Do they have a book?" or something similar, it would only deny the existence of a book, whereas *Have We given them a book?* denies that they have a divinely revealed book.

Them in *Have We given them a book?* and *thus they follow clear guidance* refers to the polytheists; one should not pay heed to those who say that it refers to the partners themselves.

Nay, the wrongdoers promise one another naught but delusion: This hits the crux of the argument. They have no proof that they can stand on for the partners they took. Instead, they are deluding each other by promising intercession and flattery. Those who came before deceived those who came after. Their chiefs and leaders deceive their flocks and followers. They swear that these partners will offer intercession before God, but there is no truth to that.

The argument in the verse is general and applies to those who worshipped idols as well as those who worshipped angels, jinn, and saints, and took them as deities, turning to them. It also applies to those who worshipped the spirits of the planets and stars, turned to the planets and stars, and took them as deities. It also applies to those who worshipped the angels and other beings and took them as deities, as is said to have happened among the ancient Persians. And it applies to those who worshipped humans, such as the Christians who worshipped Jesus.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُمْسِكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضَ أَن تَزُولا وَلَئِن زَالَتَا إِنْ أَمْسَكَهُمَا
مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّن بَعْدِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا ﴿٤١﴾

(35:41) ***Allah upholds the heavens and the earth lest they cease to be. If they were to disappear, no one after Him could maintain them. He has always been clement, forgiving.***

The following view has been put forth:

This verse initiates a new discussion and is not related to what

> passed before it. It disproves that God has any partners and indicates that this is something appalling—meaning that God protects the heavens and earth lest they cease to be or dwindle away. This is because for something possible to come into being, the necessary preconditions must be present, both to create it, and to sustain its existence.[1]

What is apparent here is that when God presents proof for the oneness of His lordship and grants successorship (*khilāfah*) to the human race (*He is the one who has made you successors on the earth…*), then denies that He has any partners whatsoever, the argumentation is generalized to encompass all creation—meaning the heavens and the earth. The argument for God's oneness includes the continuance of creation after its instantiation. For it is clear that there is no doubt in the fact that creating a thing—first clothing it in existence after nothingness—is different from making it last, and enwrapping it in existence after existence in order for it to persist. So the continued existence of a thing after its creation requires a creational act after a creational act, in order to result in continuity.

Causing a thing to persist after its creation is thus similar to one act of creation after another. Thus is the management of a thing. If you look keenly, you will see a continual order in creation, continuing from the moment of creation throughout its perpetuation.

The one who brought it into being, and its creator, are God, exalted be He. Even opponents acknowledge that. For God is the creator and administrator of the heavens and the earth—alone with no partners.

***Allah upholds* (yumsik) *the heavens and the earth lest they cease to be* (an tazūlā):** *Yumsik* (or *imsāk*) has its normal meaning ("to hold", "to grasp"). *They cease to be*: The implied meaning here is that He holds them because He would hate for them to disintegrate. [There is no equivalent to *lest* in the Arabic text; a literal rendition would be *Allah holds the heavens and earth that they continue.*] This phrase is attached to the previous. Some exegetes say that *yumsik* means "preventing" or "protecting". Regardless, the language is figurative and conveys the meaning of perpetuation. It refers to the continual act of bringing things into being to keep the universe alive. *Ceasing to be* would entail its evanescence or destruction.

Some exegetes say that "not ceasing to be" (*an tazūlā*) means that the heavens and earth remain distinct. That is, God fixed them in place and

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1 See *Rūḥ al-Maʿāni*, vol. 22, p. 203. [Trans.]

prevents the heavens from sinking to the earth or the earth from rising to the heavens. The idea in mind here seems sound, anyway.

If they were to disappear, no one after Him **(min aḥad min baʿdihi)** ***could maintain them:*** The context here indicates that *disappear* means "waning away" rather "vanishing", because being upheld and disappearing cannot happen at once. It means, "I swear, if they were to wane away, none could uphold them other than God, exalted be He. There is no one else to bestow existence upon them." Perhaps, *disappear* is meant in its literal sense, in which case "upholding" the universe would mean "having the power to uphold it". The first *min* is for emphasis and the second is to denote a range [*min aḥad min baʿdihi*, lit. "from one from after Him"; this literality is not expressed in translation]. The pronoun *Him* refers to God, albeit some exegetes say that it refers to the concept of disappearance [meaning "after its disappearance"].

He has always been clement, forgiving: It is due to His forbearance that He does not hasten the final end, and it is out of His forgivingness that staves off nothingness. These two divine names imply that God upholds the heavens and earth so that they do not perish until the final time has come.

In *Irshād al-ʿAql al-Salīm*, it says:

> *He has always been clement, forgiving*, the one who does not rush to give people what they deserve for their crimes. Instead, He upholds them [the heavens and the earth] strongly and keeps them tranquil, as He says: *The heavens are on the verge of bursting and the earth is on the verge of splitting* (19:90).

وَأَقْسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ جَهْدَ أَيْمَانِهِمْ لَئِن جَاءَهُمْ نَذِيرٌ لَّيَكُونُنَّ أَهْدَى مِنْ إِحْدَى الْأُمَمِ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ نَذِيرٌ مَّا زَادَهُمْ إِلاَّ نُفُورًا ﴿٤٢﴾

(35:42) ***And they swore by Allah with their strongest oaths*** **(jahd aymānihim)** ***that if a warner came to them, they would be better guided than any of the other nations. But when a warner came to them, it increased them in naught but aversion*** **(nufūr).**

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Jahd* and *juhd* mean "effort" and "exertion"… And they swore by God with their strongest oaths means that they swore and strove in their swearing to do it to the best of their ability.… *Nafr* (*nufūr*)

means to be averse from a thing or to flee from it, and, like the word *fazaʿ* ("to be frightened of"), can be used with the preposition *ilā* or the preposition *ʿan*. *Nafr* is used in it increased them in naught but aversion (*nufūr*).

It is related:[1]

> Before the Prophet was formally appointed as a prophet, the Quraysh heard that the People of the Book had denied their messengers. Thus, they said, "May God curse the Jews and the Christians! Messengers came to them, and they denied them. By God, if a messenger came to us, we would be the most guided of peoples."

The context of the verse supports this account.

And they swore by Allah with their strongest oaths: *They* refers to the Quraysh. The next part of the verse—*but when a warner came to them*—indicates that had sworn this before the appointment of the Prophet. What they swore is that *they would be better guided than any of the other nations*.

And they swore…that if a warner came to them, they would be better guided than any of the other nations: Meaning that they would be better guided than any of the other nations that received a warner, such as the Jews and the Christians. It says *they would be better guided than any of the other nations* rather than *better guided than them* [with the pronoun "them"] to indicate that they were a people who had never received warner; therefore, if a warner came to them, they would be like the peoples who had received warners and, through believing in their warner, they would become more guided than the others. This is what is meant by *better guided than any of the other peoples*; understand that.

Some exegetes say that the verse is general, and *any of the other peoples* (iḥdā al-umam) is generic, although it is it is an indefinite phrase in a positive sentence. Thus, the *al-* in *al-umam* signifies something already known (for *ʿahd*)and means, "So that it may be more guided than every single one of those nations who denied their messengers, among the Jews, Christians, and others."

Some exegetes say that it means, "So that they may be more guided than a people who are called *the one people*" to distinguish them from all other people; just as it is said, the single person of the community or the singular of his time.

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1 This is narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Abū Hilāl and Ibn Jarīḥ.

The last interpretation is somewhat imposed and farfetched.

*But when a warner came to them, it increased them in naught but aversion (*nufūr*)*: By "warner" is meant the Prophet. *Nufūr* means "to distance one's self from" and "to flee".

اسْتِكْبَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَكْرَ السَّيِّئِ وَلَا يَحِيقُ الْمَكْرُ السَّيِّئُ إِلَّا بِأَهْلِهِ فَهَلْ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّا سُنَّتَ الْأَوَّلِينَ فَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلا وَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ تَحْوِيلا ﴿٤٣﴾

(35:43) ***Arrogance in the land, and evil plots* (makr).** ***And an evil plot does nothing but turn back on its plotters. What are they waiting for except for [a repeat of] what happened to the ancients? You shall not find any change in the wont of Allah. You shall not find any difference in the wont of Allah.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Makr* means "treating others deceptively to attain one's ends". There are two types of *makr*: (a) a praiseworthy plot—that is, a scheme to do good—as mentioned in the verse *And Allah is the best of planners* (8:30), and (b) a blameworthy plot—that is, a scheme to do evil, as in the verse *And an evil plot does nothing but turn back on its plotters* (35:43).

He also said:

> *And an evil plot does nothing but turn back on its plotters* means that it only afflicts the plotters.

Some say that the verb *yaḥīq* originally came from the root *ḥ-q-q* [instead of *ḥāq*], and the short vowel plus the doubled letter turned into a long vowel followed by a single letter, like the verb *zall* and *zāl*, which has been read both as *fa-azallahummā al-shayṭān* and *fa-azālhummā al-shayṭān* [*Satan made them both slip*, 2:36, referring to Adam and Eve]. A similar example is the verb *dhammahu* and *dhāmahu* (both meaning "to censure").

Arrogance in the land is a verbal noun providing the reasoning behind *aversion* (nufūr), meaning "They distance themselves from him in order to be arrogant on the earth." *Evil plot* is linked with *arrogance* via a conjunction and similarly provides the reason for their *aversion*. Some say that it is linked to *aversion*, in a genitive (*iḍāfah*) construction whereby what is

being described is appended to the description, as evinced by *and an evil plot does nothing but turn back…*

And an evil plot does nothing but turn back on its plotters: This means that the evil plot only ultimately afflicts those who are plotting it. Yes, it may sometimes afflict those it is aimed at, but it will eventually pass away and will not persist; however, the evil effects will remain with the plotters. The evil effects will remain in their souls and be visible upon them, and they will be requited justly for their plots, either in this world or in the next. For this reason, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says: "It means that the recompense of this evil plot will only fall back on those who plotted it."

Thus, the verse should be taken as a proverb, as in the verses: *Your insolence is against your own souls* (10:23) and *whoever breaks his oath does so to the harm of his own soul* (48:10).

What are they waiting for (*fa-hal yanẓurūn*) except for [a repeat of] what happened to the ancients? *Naẓr* and *intiẓār* (*yanẓurūn*) mean "to wait for" or "to expect". The *fāʾ* [in *fa-hal*] indicates that this is a consequence. The sentence itself is a rhetorical question expressing the natural consequence of the sentence before. It means, "If they plot an evil plot, and an evil plot falls back upon its plotters, then they are only waiting for God to treat them the same way that He did the ancient peoples—that is, for divine chastisement to rain down upon them as a result of their plots and belying the signs of God."

You shall not find any change in the wont* (sunnah) *of Allah. You shall not find any difference in the wont* (sunnah) *of Allah:[1] "Changing the *sunnah*" (tabdīl al-sunnah) would mean exchanging safety and blessings for punishment. "A difference in the *sunnah*" (taḥwīl al-sunnah) would be to lift divine punishment from a people who deserved it and inflict it on another [who did not deserve it]. God's *sunnah* is never changed or altered, for God is on the straight path; his decrees are not subject to the consideration of other opinions or exception.

God punished those polytheists who plotted on the Day of Badr and killed many of them.

This verse is either addressed directly to the Prophet or to all listeners.

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ

1 The alternative translation of *the sunnah of Allah* is Divine Precedence or the Custom of God. (Pub.)

وَكَانُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُعْجِزَهُ مِن شَيْءٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَلِيمًا قَدِيرًا ﴿٤٤﴾

(35:44) ***Have they not travelled in the land and seen the end of those who came before them, even though they were mightier? Nothing escapes Allah in the heavens or the earth; He is knowing, powerful.***

This bears witness to the perpetuation of God's *sunnah* with respect to the ancient peoples. They were more powerful than the Meccan polytheists, yet God punished them when they plotted and denied [the truth].

Nothing escapes Allah in the heavens or the earth: This finishes off the previous point with the effect of inspiring more of a sense of warning and more fear. The net result is that they should fear God, believe in Him, not plot against Him, and not deny [the truth], for if the *sunnah* of God is to punish and destroy people who do that—as what happened to the past nations demonstrates, even though those people were mightier—then nothing and no plot can escape God's power in the heavens or on the earth. For He is omniscient, never heedless or unaware of anything. He will never been deceived or deluded by their plots and schemes. He is omnipotent, and nothing can overwhelm omnipotence.

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَى ظَهْرِهَا مِن دَابَّةٍ وَلَكِن يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجَلُهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ بَصِيرًا ﴿٤٥﴾

(35:45) ***Were Allah to take people to account for what they have done, not a single creature would be left upright on its face. However, he grants them respite until an appointed term. And when their term comes—Allah sees His servants.***

Here, by "taking people to account" is meant taking them to account in this world; this is demonstrated by the subsequent statement *he grants them respite until an appointed term…*

By *people* is meant "all people", even though the previous verse speaks of punishing some of them—namely, the plotters who denied God. Since the verses are speaking about divine punishment, *taken to account for what they have done* refers to the accumulation of sins. A similar verse is: *Were Allah to seize people for their wrongdoing, not a single creature would be*

left on earth (16:61).

By *its face* (ẓahrihā, lit. "its back") is meant the face of the earth which human beings live upon. The earth was previously mentioned [as the antecedent of the pronoun *its*] in the previous verse.

Creature (dābah) here refers to every person who walks upon the earth, whether they be male or female, old or young. Possibly, it may refer to every animal that creeps or crawls along the earth, not just the human, and refer to the destruction of animal life in general. This is because they have been created for the human being, as this verse indicates: He created for you everything that is on the earth (2:29).

Some exegetes say that this is because of the evil portents of sinfulness. God says: *Beware of a distress that does not only not seize those of you who do wrong* (8:25). This view is rejected because the evils of sinfulness should only afflict the wrongdoers. God says: *None shall bear the burden of another* (35:18). However, the previous verse (that is, *beware of a distress that does not only seize those of you who do wrong*) indicates what has been explained before—namely, that there is a punishment to befall the wrongdoers specifically, not the masses in general. (Refer back to some of our previous explanations.)

However, He grants them respite until an appointed term: This refers to death, or the resurrection.

And when their term comes—Allah sees His servants: This means that all shall be requited for all they have done, for He sees them and knows their deeds. They are His servants; how could the creator be unaware of His creation, or a lord be unaware of the deeds of His servants?

From what came before, it is clear that *Allah sees His servants* is a construction in which the cause and effect are inverted; it means that they shall be requited.

Were Allah to take people to account for what they have done…: This verse is constructed as an answer to an implied question lingering from the previous verse. God warned the plotters and deniers among the polytheists about divine punishment, and cited evidence of what had happened to past peoples. He reminded them that He has full power over the heavens and the earth. It is as if He was saying: "And if nothing in the heavens or earth can escape His grasp, how could the rest of human beings be left alone to perpetrate the evils that they are committing? What will stop them from being destroyed for what they have done?" Then, it provides a response: "Were God to obliterate people for what they have done, just like

He destroyed those previous plotters and beliers, not a single soul would be left on the face of the earth to creep about. However, God, the Exalted, has decreed that they should live upon the earth and grants them their lifespan when He said *You have a place of rest on the earth and a livelihood, for a time* (2:36). So He does not take them to account; instead, he delays it until an appointed time, and that is death or the resurrection. So when their time comes, treat them according to what they have wrought; for He always saw what His servants did."

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim relates via Sufyān from Abū Zakariyā al-Kūfi that a man related that the Prophet said:
Beware of evil schemes, for they only fall back on those who plot them, and God will be the one to enact vengeance upon them.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, al-Qummī relates from his father from al-Nawfalī from al-Sakūnī from Jaʿfar [al-Ṣādiq] from his father [Imām al-Bāqir]:
The Messenger of God said, "God knew beforehand. The pen has dried, and fate has come to pass. Destiny has been fulfilled—through the actualization of the book and the messengers having been proven true; with felicity from God for whoever believed and was conscious of Him, and misery for those who denied and disbelieved; with nearness to [*wilāyah*] and protection from God, the Mighty and Glorious, for the believers, and with His disavowal of the polytheists."
Then the Messenger of God said, "God, the Mighty and Glorious, says, 'O son of Adam! My will enabled you to will things on your own. My desire enabled you to desire things on your own. My grace and blessings upon you empowered you to disobey Me. My power, protection, and security enabled you to fulfill the required acts. So I am more worthy of your good deeds than you, and you are more worthy of your sins than Me. Good comes from Me to you because of what I have gifted you, and evil comes from you to yourselves due to what you have committed, as a recompense. You came to obey Me because of My immense dominance over you, and you despaired of My mercy because of your ill hopes in Me. So Mine is the praise, and I have the argument over you by giving you clear proof. I am the one who has a way against you

for your transgression, but you have a good reward with me for goodness. I did not abandon warning you and I do not take you to account at your times of ignorance'—and this is what God, the Mighty and Glorious, says: *Were Allah to take people to account for what they have done, not a single creature would be left upright on its face* (35:45). 'I do not charge you with that which is beyond your ability, and I do not hold you to account for any trust that you have not already confessed to. And I am pleased with you in My self about what you are pleased with in Me.' Then He said: *However, he grants them respite until an appointed term. And when their term comes—Allah sees His servants* (35:45)."

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Chapter 36

Sūrah Yā Sīn

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Verses 1–12

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah explains the three fundamental principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*). It begins with prophethood and describes the condition of the people in accepting or rejecting the prophetic call. It explains that the goal of the true prophetic call is reviving a people through bringing them onto the path of happiness and proving true the word against others. In other words, it hastens people in completing their journey—towards ultimate happiness or ultimate despair, whichever path they choose.

Then the sūrah proceeds to a discussion of the oneness of God and enumerates the entirety of the signs of God's oneness. Then it proceeds to a reminder of the hereafter and the resurrection for the sake of granting people their just recompense and sifting out the criminals from the God-conscious on that day. It describes what it will be like for both groups.

Then it returns to what it began with and summarizes and proves the three *usūl al-dīn*. With that, the sūrah finishes. Among the marvels of the sūrah are the verses:

> *Whenever He wills something, he says to it "Be!" and it is. So glory be to the one in whose hands is dominion over all things, and to whom you shall return.* (36:82–83)

The sūrah has a lofty status. It fuses the root principles of truth with the things that branch from them. Both Sunni and Shiʿi narrations say: "Everything has a heart, and the heart of the Qur'an is [Sūrah] Yā Sīn."

The content of the verses indicates that the sūrah is Meccan.

يس ﴿١﴾ وَالْقُرْآنِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾ إِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٣﴾ عَلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ
مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾ تَنزِيلَ الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٥﴾ لِتُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَّا أُنذِرَ آبَاؤُهُمْ فَهُمْ

غَافِلُونَ ۝٦

(36:1–6) Yā Sīn.[1] ***By the wise Qur'an, you are one of the messengers upon a straight path. [This is] a revelation from the Mighty, the Merciful, so that you may warn a people whose fathers had not been warned; therefore, they are unmindful.***

Here, God swears by the wise Qur'an that the Prophet is actually a prophet. The Qur'an is described as *wise* (*ḥakīm*) because in it lies wisdom—namely, deep truths and what springs from them in terms of religious laws, signs and stories to ponder, and moral exhortations.

You are one of the messengers: This is what is being sworn, as mentioned previously.

Upon a straight path: This is a second predicate to *you are*. According to exegetes, *path* (ṣirāṭ) is left indefinite [that is, it does not say "upon the straight path"] to express the enormity of that path. It is described as *straight* (mustaqīm) for clarification: that is, it is a path which is clear and straight. It is a road which delivers its wayfarers to God—meaning, to human happiness. On it lie the perfection of servitude to God and nearness to God. Some of its benefits were mentioned in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Fātiḥa.

[This is] a revelation from the Mighty, the Merciful: This phrase describes the Qur'an. It is separate from what it is describing [the Qur'an, which is back in verse 2] and is in the accusative case because it is a form of praise. Grammatically, it is a verbal noun acting as an object. In other words, it explains the "Qur'an" as "that which has been revealed by God, the Mighty, the Merciful; in it lie mercy and grandeur."

It ends with two descriptive adjectives to show that God is powerful and never overpowered, victorious and invincible. Those who shy away from worshipping Him do not weaken Him, nor do the lies of the liars or the deniers disgrace Him. He is still full of an expansive mercy for whoever follows the reminder and fears Him unseen. He does not benefit from their faith; rather, it is so that it may guide them to happiness and perfection. In His might and mercy, He sent messengers and revealed the wise Qur'an, in order to warn people. Thus, some have earned punishment;

1 The discussion on abbreviated or disjointed letters takes place in the exegesis of Ch. 42 (see Eng. Vol. 35). [Pub.]

He envelops others with His mercy.

So that you may warn a people **(qawman)** ***whose fathers had not been warned*** **(mā undhira abāʾuhum)*****; therefore, they are unmindful:*** This explains why the messengers and revelation were sent. *Mā* here means "not". The entire clause describes *qawman*. It means: "He sent you and revealed the Qurʾan to you so that you might warn and put the fear of God into a people whose fathers were not warned; hence, they are oblivious."

People (qawm) here may refer to (a) the Quraysh and those linked to them. "Their fathers" would refer to either their recent forefathers, for their distant forefathers included the prophet Ishmael (whom God ordered Abraham to sacrifice), and other messengers, like Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb, were also sent to the Arabs. It may also refer to (b) all people at the time of the Prophet, given that the Prophet's message was universal. For the last prophet who is known to have come before the final Prophet was Jesus, and there was a long time between the two.

Know that what we have said regarding these verses is what first comes to mind. Other views have also been put forward; however, since they require some mental wrangling to arrive at, they have been omitted here. Those who are interested in them can consult the relevant sources.

لَقَدْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ عَلَى أَكْثَرِهِمْ فَهُمْ لا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٧﴾

(36:7) ***The word has been proven true*** **(laqad ḥaqq al-qawl)** ***for most of them, so they do not believe.***

The *al-* denotes an oath, meaning, "I swear, most of them have merited the decree of punishment [lit. 'the word has been proven true against them']." "The word being proven true" means "they have become instances or examples of how the decree is passed against them [lit. 'how the word has been proven true against them']."

"Word" here refers to the decree of punishment. A similar use is found in the following verse, in an account of the beginning of creation, when God says to Iblīs [Satan]:

> *He said, The truth is that—and I speak the truth—I shall fill hell with you and your followers, all of them.* (38:84–85)

Here, the intent behind "following Iblīs" means obeying the whispers and suggestions that he casts into the hearts of men to tempt them. He makes these ideas take root into people's souls, as this verse—in which God also speaks to Iblīs—also says:

> *You shall not have any authority over My servants, except over the perverse who follow you, and hellfire awaits all of you.* (15:43)

The consequence of that is rebellion and arrogance against the truth as it is alluded to in what God reports from the conversation of the leaders and their followers in the fire:

> *And we had no authority over you; you were a rebellious people. So the sentence of our Lord has come to pass against us; we shall taste it. We led you astray; we ourselves were straying.* (37:30–32)
>
> *The decree [*lit. "word"*] of punishment has been passed upon the rejectors. It will be said: "Enter the gates of hell to abide therein forever, and what a wretched abode it is for the arrogant."* (39:72)

The consequences of devoting one's self wholly towards this worldly life and turning away from the hereafter, and of that inclination becoming firmly entrenched in one's soul, are described in:

> *But such as open their breast to unbelief, on them is wrath from Allah, and theirs will be a dreadful penalty. This because they love the life of this world better than the hereafter, and Allah will not guide those who reject faith. Those are they whose hearts, ears, and eyes Allah has sealed up, and they take no heed.* (16:106–108)

God seals their hearts, and, one of the consequences of this is that they can no longer find a path back to faith. God says:

> *Those upon whom the word of your Lord has come to pass shall not believe.* (10:96)

Thus, the conjunction *fa-* in *they shall not believe* (*fa-hum lā yuʾminūn*) serves to express the natural of consequence of things, not—as some exegetes have speculated—to provide a specific reason.

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ أَغْلالاً فَهِيَ إِلَى الأَذْقَانِ فَهُم مُّقْمَحُونَ ﴿٨﴾

(36:8) ***We have placed chains*** **(aghlāl)** ***on their necks*** **(aʿnāq),** ***and these reach up to their chins, so their heads are forced up*** **(muqmaḥūn).**

Aʿnāq is the plural of *ʿunuq*, meaning "neck". *Aghlāl* is the plural of *ghill* and—according to lexicologists—refers to the shackles used to bind a person's hand to their neck during torture. *Muqmaḥūn* is a participle derived from the root *q-m-ḥ*, and it means "raising the head". It is as if their chests to their chins are criss-crossed with chains, so their heads are affixed, forced aloft to the sky. They do not let them see the path in

front of them so they can understand what is on it or distinguish it from anything else.

Chains (aghlāl) is indefinite so that it comes across as immense and frightening.

The verse itself acts as an explanation of the clause, *they do not believe*.

وَجَعَلْنَا مِن بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ سَدًّا وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ سَدًّا فَأَغْشَيْنَاهُمْ فَهُمْ لاَ يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

(36:9) *And We set before them and behind them a barrier* (sad-dan)*, and have covered them* (aghshaynāhum) *so they do not see.*

Sadd means "a barrier between two things". *Before them and behind them* is a figure of speech meaning "from all sides". *Aghshaynāhum* comes from a root meaning "to cover". It is used for a thing (that is, physically covering an object) or a matter (that is, a cover-up). The verse as a whole offers an explanation for the previous one. The verb *set* (*jaʿalnā*) is linked by a conjunction to the verb *jaʿalnā* (rendered here as *we placed*) in the previous verse.

Tafsīr al-Rāzī explains the metaphor of blindness in these two verses by dividing people into two categories. Some people are unable to see themselves; that is likened to shackles constricting the head and forcing it upright, such that a person could not look at himself or herself. Others are unable to behold the wider horizons, and that is likened to being surrounded by a barrier such that one could not see the skyline, thereby depriving the person of the ability to see the signs of God. A person who is tried with the loss of both forms of sight (or insight) is deprived of vision completely.

Together, the two verses mean that they do not believe, for God has shackled their hands to their necks with chains, and the chains are such that their heads are perpetually locked in place. He has surrounded them on all sides with a barrier and covered them with it. As a result, they can neither see, nor are they guided.

The two verses are a metaphor showing how they are deprived of guidance towards faith. God has deprived them of it due to their ingratitude, wilful disbelief, perverseness, and rebellion. Something similar was

discussed with respect to the following verse in the first volume of this book:[1]

> *Allah is not ashamed to set forth any parable—(that of) a gnat or anything above that. Those who believe know that it is the truth from their Lord, and those disbelieve say, "What does Allah mean by this parable?" He causes many to err with it and many He leads aright with it! But He only causes the transgressors to err with it.* (2:26)

Descriptions like this are used in the Qur'an to describe the believers and the disbelievers to reveal something about the hidden inner life of the human being. In this worldly life, it is hidden from the material senses but becomes apparent—along with other realities—upon death and the resurrection. Descriptions like this are not just figurative, like some exegetes say; rather, they have a real form.

وَسَوَاء عَلَيْهِمْ أَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لاَ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(36:10) ***It makes no difference whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe.***

This verse either (a) explains and emphasizes the three preceding verses. It sums up their main point and paves the way for the next verse (*you can only warn those who follow the reminder…*), or (b) may be part of the same construction as *they do not see*, in which case, it would mean, "Since they do not see, it is the same whether or not you warn them; they will not believe." However, when reading the verses, the first view springs to mind first.

إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ الذِّكْرَ وَخَشِيَ الرَّحْمَن بِالْغَيْبِ فَبَشِّرْهُ بِمَغْفِرَةٍ وَأَجْرٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿١١﴾

(36:11) ***You can only warn those who follow the reminder and fear the Merciful unseen; give glad tidings to them of forgiveness and a generous reward.***

The grammatical particle *innamā* which begins the verse (here,

1 See the discussion beginning on page 92 of Volume 1 of the English translation by late Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi (Tawheed Inst., 2020).

translated as "only") indicates restriction. [That is, only some people who can be warned, not everyone.] *Warn* here denotes a warning which has an effect. The *reminder* (dhikr) refers to the Qur'an—following it, believing in it, and inclining towards it when it is recited. *Follow* and *fear* are [in Arabic, not in the translation] in the past tense to show that these things are certain [that is, whoever fears God will follow the message]. "Fearing the Merciful unseen" means having awe towards God when He is unseen, before the lifting of the veil from reality upon death and the resurrection.

Some exegetes maintain that *unseen* means fearing God in private (as opposed to being a hypocrite), but this is farfetched.

"The Merciful" is used with "fearing" to show how mercy attracts hope; when people fear, that fear is tinged with hope. This is the ideal situation of the servant [of God]—to neither feel secure from God's wrath, nor despair of His mercy.

Forgiveness and *a generous reward* are both in the indefinite form for emphasis, meaning, "Grant him glad tidings of great forgiveness from God, and an immeasurably generous reward—namely, the garden." (This meaning is indicated by the verses that came before.)

Altogether, it means, "Your warnings will only be effective for people who heed the Qur'an when its verses are recited to them—for people who incline towards it and fear the Merciful with a fear tinged with hope. Give them glad tidings of immense forgiveness and a generous, immeasurable reward."

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَارَهُمْ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿١٢﴾

(36:12) ***We give life to the dead and record what they have sent forth and what they have left behind. And we have kept an account of all things in a clear registry*** **(imām).**

"Giving life to the dead" means "resurrecting them for recompense". "What they sent forth" refers to their deeds during their lifetimes, which they sent forward into death. "What they have left behind" refers to the legacies they leave behind after death. These legacies may be good—such as teaching beneficial knowledge, building a mosque that people pray in, or constructing a fountain for ablutions—or evil, such as establishing a heretic practice that persists, or building a house of ill repute.

Some might imagine that "what they have sent forth" refers to their intentions, and "what they have left behind" refers to the consequences of their deeds. However, this is somewhat distant from what the verses actually say.

"Accounting for" (or "writing", *kitāba*) what they have sent before and left behind refers to how the divine scribes (who are angels) record their deeds on their scrolls of deeds. However, these divine angelic scribes are not the same beings who inscribe and account for all deeds in the *clear registry* (imām mubīn), which is the protected tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*). This is despite the fact that some exegetes are under the illusion that "writing what they have sent before and what they have left behind" is the same thing as "recording them in a clear registry" (as described at the end of 36:12). This is because God affirms in the Qur'an the existence of a book that records everything. Then there are other books in which the deeds of each nation are recorded, and then individual books in which each person's deeds are recorded:

> *There is nothing wet or dry that is not in a clear book.* (6:59)
> *Every nation shall be summoned, along with its book.* (45:28)
> *We have affixed every person's fate to his neck, and, on the day of resurrection, We shall bring forth for him a wide-open book.* (17:13)

These verses also indicate that the book of deeds and the "clear registry" (*imām mubīn*) are two separate things, in that they differ with respect to being comprehensive [encompassing all things] and specific [pertaining to individual human beings]; furthermore, different verbs are used for "writing" [*kitāba*, lit. "to write", versus *aḥṣā*ʾ, lit. "to enumerate" or "to account for"].

We have kept an account of all things in a clear registry: This is the tablet which is protected from being changed (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*). On it are the details of the divine decree for His creation. Therefore, on it, all things are accounted for. It is mentioned in the Qur'an by various names, such as the "protected tablet" (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), the "mother book" (*umm al-kitāb*), the "clear book" (*kitāb mubīn*), and the "clear registry" (*imām mubīn*). Each of these expressions has its own overtones.

Perhaps, it is called a "clear registry" (*imām mubīn*) to show that it contains all of the firmly fixed decrees for creation as well as the scrolls of deeds, as will be explained in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Jāthiya—a selection of which reads:

> *This is Our book which speaks truly to you. We were duplicating in*

it what you used to do. (45:29)

Some say that *clear registry* (imām mubīn) refers to people's books scrolls of deeds. However, this is unfounded. Some also say that it refers to God's knowledge. This view is more or less unfounded like the previous one, unless one considers "God's knowledge" to mean "his active knowledge" (*ʿilmuhu al-fiʿlī*) [that is, the way that He wills His decree, which is part of His knowledge, into existence], in which case it might have a basis.

One of the more bizarre exegetical views is that the protected tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) contains what has happened and what shall be only until the day of resurrection, not for all eternity. This is because [some] Muslims held that the tablet has a physical form but contains a record of all things, and a physical object must have finite dimensions.[1] The premise that a finite object cannot contain infinite things is sound. However, the assumption that *all things* only includes things until the day of judgment is arbitrary and unfounded, as we will show.

The verse itself acts as an explanation for what came before it. It is as if God is saying: "We have told you about the situation of those people who brought punishment upon themselves. We have also told you about the situation of those people who follow the reminder and fear their Lord although He is hidden. All life is in Our hands. Their deeds, and the legacies of those deeds, are all preserved with Us. We know them, and we know what each group will receive on account of them."

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *their heads are forced up* (36:8), says: Their heads are raised.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *And We set before them and behind them a barrier, and have covered them so they do not see* (36:9), a narration from Abū al-Jārūd from Imām al-Bāqir says:
This is regarding guidance. God has taken away their powers of hearing, seeing, and perceiving; therefore their acts contradict [the dictates of] guidance. This was revealed about Abū Jahl ibn Hishām and some of his family. This is because Abū Jahl—may

1 That is, in order for the tablet to contain a record of all things for an infinite span of time, the tablet would have to be infinitely large, but a physical object cannot be infinitely large. Therefore, they argue that it only contains a record of all things for a finite length of time. [Trans.]

God curse him!—had sworn that when he saw the Prophet praying, he would brain him. So when the Prophet started praying, Abū Jahl came to him, stone in hand. However, whenever he raised the stone to throw it at the Prophet, God, the Mighty and Glorious, bound his hand to his neck, so he could not use his hand to throw the stone, and the stone would not take flight from his hand. When he returned to his people, the stone fell from his hand. Then one of his clansmen stood up and told him, "I will kill him." However, when he came close to the Prophet, he heard the Prophet reciting [the Qur'an] was struck with fear. So he returned to his people and said that a fearsome form, like a stallion threatening him with its tail, had come between him and the Prophet, and so he took fright and left. This is the explanation of this verse: *It makes no difference whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe* (36:10)—that is, none of the Banū Makhzūm tribe believed.

Author's comments: Something similar is related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, from al-Bayhaqī in *al-Dalāʾil* from Ibn ʿAbbās. Among what is said in that narration is:

Some of the Banū Makhzūm tribe plotted to kill the Prophet; among them were Abū Jahl and al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīra. And so when the Prophet was standing in prayer and they heard him reciting, they sent al-Walīd to kill him. So he hurried over until he came to the place where the Prophet was praying. He could hear him reciting but could not see him. So he hurried back and told them that. So they all went, and when they arrived at the place where the Prophet was praying, they heard him reciting and went in that direction. Then they heard him reciting behind them and turned around, but they could not find him. This is the meaning of: *And We set before them and behind them a barrier, and have covered them so they do not see* (36:9).

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Ibn Mardawayh and Abū Nuʿaym [al-Iṣfahānī] in *al-Dalāʾil* from Ibn ʿAbbās:

The Prophet was reciting [the Qur'an] loudly in the mosque so that it would irk the Quraysh. But when they resolved to accost him, their hands were stuck to their necks, and they could not see. So they came to the Prophet and said, "We appeal to you by God and our bonds of kinship, O Muhammad"—and there was not a single clan of the Quraysh related to the Prophet that was

not represented there—so the Prophet prayed until their affliction was removed. Then, verses 36:1–7 were revealed. However, none of them ever believed.

Author's comments: This story is also related in different forms. Some say that the Prophet was reciting certain verses, upon which he disappeared from sight and they could not find him, and thus God protected him from their evil schemes. Some say that verses 36:1–7 were revealed with respect to this story, and that the next two verses speak of the way that God defended the Prophet from these people by hiding him from their eyes. The next verse (*it makes no difference whether you warn them or do not warn them*) predicts that none of them would ever believe.

However, you can tell that the verses themselves do not concord with these stories. The verses themselves match what was said earlier about two groups of people—those upon whom the word has been decreed, thus they do not believe; and those who follow the reminder and fear their Lord unseen.

This can be specified if one considers the verse *the word has been proven true for most of them* to apply to all people who were warned, whereas the verses *we have placed chains on their necks* and *we have set before them and behind them a barrier* as specifically applying to the story of Abū Jahl and his clansman. Then, *it makes no difference whether you warn them or do not worn them* would refer to his clansman. Furthermore, *[we] record what they have sent forth and what they have left behind* could relate to a story (which will be discussed subsequently) about some of the Anṣār in Medina. However, this really butchers the apparent meaning and unity of the verses.

The truth is, the verses were all revealed at one time for one purpose. They describe the human condition and the way, upon hearing the warning, people bifurcate into two groups. This has no bearing on whether or not the stories actually happened and whether or not God miraculously protected the Prophet from his enemies.

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related[1] that Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī said: The Banū Salamah tribe were [settled] in the outskirts of Medina

1 It is related from ʿAbd al-Razzāq; al-Tirmidhī, who considered it acceptable (*ḥasan*); al-Bazzār; Ibn Jarīr; Ibn Mundhir; Ibn Abī Ḥātim; al-Ḥākim, who considered it authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*); Ibn Mardawayh; and al-Bayhaqī in *Shuʿb al-Īmān*.

and decided to move near the mosque. So God revealed: *[We] record what they have sent forth and what they have left behind (*or "their footprints", 36:12).[1] So the Messenger of God called them and said, "God records your footprints," then recited the verse to them, and they changed their mind.

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related[2] that Ibn ʿAbbās said:
The Anṣār lived far from the mosque and wanted to move closer. So it was revealed: *[We] record what they have sent forth and their footprints* (36:12), and they said, "We will stay where we are."

Author's comments: What was said above [about narration number 3] is also applicable to these two narrations [numbers 4 and 5].

(6) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related that Ibn Abī Ḥātim said that Jarīr ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Bajalī said:
The Messenger of God said: "Whoever establishes a good practice (*sunnah*) will have the reward of establishing it as well as a reward for whoever practices it after him, and this will not diminish any of the reward granted to those enacting it. And whoever establishes an evil practice (*sunnah*) will bear its burden, and a burden for every person after him who practices it, although this will not diminish any of the burden borne by those enacting it." Then he recited the verse: *[We] record what they have sent forth and what they have left behind* (36:12).

(7) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *And we have kept an account of all things in a clear registry (*imām[in] mubīn*)* (36:12), it says:
This means the "clear book" (*kitāb mubīn*) which is inalterable. Ibn ʿAbbās relates that the Commander of the Faithful said: "I, by God, am the *imām mubīn*. I distinguish between the truth and the falsehood and have inherited this from the Messenger of God."

(8) In *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*, it is related via a chain of narration from Abū al-Jārūd from Imām al-Bāqir from his father from his grandfather that the Prophet said about ʿAlī:

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1 *Footprints* is a literal translation of *āthārahum*. *Āthār* can be translated as "footprints", "archaeological ruins", "vestiges", or "traces". Generally, in this verse, it is understood to mean what people leave behind (hence *what they have left behind*), but, here, it is being taken literally. [Trans.]

2 It is related from al-Faryābi, Aḥmad in *al-Zuhd*, ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mundhir, al-Ṭabarānī, and Ibn Mardawayh.

He is the *imām* in whom God, the Blessed and Exalted, has recorded the knowledge of all things.

Author's comments: If these two narrations are correct, they do not act as exegesis. Rather, they explain the inner meaning of the Qur'an or its implications. There is nothing stopping God from granting one of His sincere servants knowledge of the clear book—and this would be the Commander of the Monotheists [Imām ʿAlī] after the Prophet.

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Verses 13–32

These verses convey a parable giving both warnings and glad tidings. God sets it forth to all people. It mentions the divinely sent message and those things which accompany the call to truth, such as forgiveness and a great reward for whoever believes, follows the reminder [the Qur'an], and fears the Merciful unseen. Similarly, it warns of severe divine torment for those who reject and deny it, for the divine sentence shall be enacted upon them. It speaks of the oneness of God and the return of all people to God.

There is no contradiction between saying that they will not believe regardless of whether or not you warn them, and warning them, because in delivering the warning, proof is established, and it leads to the ultimate end of happiness or wretchedness. God says:

> *That he who would perish might perish by clear proof, and he who would live might live by clear proof.* (8:42)
> *And We reveal of the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers, and it adds only to the perdition of the unjust.* (17:82)

وَاضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلاً أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

(36:13) *Set forth for them a parable of the people of the town, when messengers came to it.*

A *parable* (mathal) is a story or utterance aimed at conveying or illustrating a specific point to the listeners. This particular story, which the Prophet was instructed to tell, elucidates the concepts of divine reward and punishment.

Mathal^{an} comes across as a second object of the verb *set forth* (iḍrib). The first object is *the people of the town* (aṣḥāb al-qaryah). It means, "Set forth for them a parable of the people of the town. They are in the same situation as the people in this parable." The second object comes before the first object [whereas it would typically come after it] in order to avoid disrupting the meaning [due to the presence of intervening text].

إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَيْكُم مُّرْسَلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(36:14) ***We sent them two, but they denied both of them, so we strengthened them with a third, and said, "We have been sent to you."***

Strengthened (ᶜazzaznā) comes from the same root as ᶜazīz ("mighty", "strong").[1] *And so we strengthened them with a third* clarifies *when messengers came to it.*

It means: "Tell them a parable of the people of this town, when back in their day, We sent them two of our messengers. They denied the two messengers, and so We strengthened them with a third messenger. The messengers said, 'We have been sent to you by God.'"

قَالُوا مَا أَنتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا وَمَا أَنزَلَ الرَّحْمَٰنُ مِن شَيْءٍ إِنْ أَنتُمْ إِلَّا تَكْذِبُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(36:15) ***They said, "You are but mortals like us. The Merciful did not send anything. You do nothing but lie."***

They used to believe that human beings could not be prophets or receive divine revelation. They put themselves forward as evidence for that, in that they personally were not prophets and did not receive divine revelation. They then applied that conclusion to the prophets, assuming that what was true for one was true for all [that is, that all human beings were the same].

Based on this, *the Merciful did not send anything* means: "God did not send any revelation, and were he to send it to a person, then we would find it in ourselves, just as you claim to have received it." They use the expression "the Merciful" (*al-Raḥmān*) for God because, like other polytheists, they knew God and described Him by His noble attributes, such as the Creator, the Merciful, the Owner, and so forth.[2] However, they held that He had delegated control over creation to creations near to him such as

1 This meaning of the root of this word are discussed copiously in the exegesis of 35:10. [Trans.]

2 However, they different in how they understood these names. For instance, the Sabians employed attributes of negation. That is, instead of saying "the Omniscient (*al-ᶜālim*)", they would say "the one who is not ignorant"; or, instead of saying "the Omnipotent (*al-qādir*)", they would say, "the one who is not weak". [Trans.]

the honorable angels. Thus, they acted as lords, administering creation, and were worshipped as gods. They saw God as the über-God: the Lord of Lords, or the God of Gods.

Possibly, *the Merciful* (al-Raḥmān) is used in the story, even if it wasn't common parlance, to draw attention to the fact that God showed them forbearance and mercy before they disavowed and rejected the clear truth.

You do nothing but lie: This concludes the verse. Essentially, they are saying, "You are but men like us. We do not see any revelation coming down like you are claiming to receive, and you are human beings like us. Therefore, the Merciful did not send anything. Your claim is a lie, and if you have nothing but this claim, then you are nothing but liars."

It says *you do nothing but lie* rather than *you are nothing but liars* to accuse them of lying at the moment [about receiving divine revelation] rather than to accuse them of being inherently or perpetually liars. That is, it is an exception to the norm rather than the norm.

قَالُوا رَبُّنَا يَعْلَمُ إِنَّا إِلَيْكُمْ لَمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿١٦﴾ وَمَا عَلَيْنَا إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ﴿١٧﴾

(36:16–17) ***They said, "Our Lord knows that we have been sent to you as messengers, and our only responsibility is to give the clear message."***

God did not tell of how the messengers answered their claim that "you are but men like us".

Other parts of the Qur'an explain how the ancient messengers responded to similar objections from their people. For instance, when they were told *you are but mortals like us*, they replied:

> *Their messengers said to them: "We are nothing but mortals like yourselves, but Allah bestows [His] favors on whom He pleases of His servants, and it is not for us that we should bring you an authority except by Allah's permission; and on Allah should the believers rely."* (14:11)

Since these responses have already been presented [and one can deduce that these messengers would have replied with something similar], instead, here, the narrative tells of how they reminded their people that they had been sent to them and ordered to convey the message. That was their only responsibility. It was of no personal import to them whether or not they were believed; it was enough for them that their Lord knew that they had been sent as messengers. They needed nothing more than that.

They said, "Our Lord knows that we have been sent to you as messengers* (innā ilaykum la-mursalūn)*: This is where they remind the people that they are messengers. The particles *innā* and *la-* in *innā ilaykum la-mursalūn* emphasize their words. *Our Lord knows* intervenes as an oath, meaning, "We really are messengers who have been sent to you. Our claim is true. It is enough for us that our Lord who sent us knows that. We do not personally need for you to believe in us. We would not gain any advantage or payment or reward from that. It is not our concern whether or not our message has an effect on you; our only concern is to deliver the message clearly and thereby offer a conclusive argument."

And our only responsibility is to give the clear message* (balāgh)*: *Balāgh* means *tablīgh* ("spreading the message"). By it is intended "the delivery of the message". It means that their only job was to deliver the message and thereby provide conclusive proof.

قَالُوا إِنَّا تَطَيَّرْنَا بِكُمْ لَئِن لَّمْ تَنتَهُوا لَنَرْجُمَنَّكُمْ وَلَيَمَسَّنَّكُم مِّنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٨﴾

(36:18) ***They said, "We augur an evil omen* (taṭṭayarnā)*from you. If you do not desist, we will stone you and afflict you with a painful torment."***

Here, the townspeople are speaking to the messengers. *Taṭṭayyur* means "to see as inauspicious" or "to take an evil omen".

They are threatening the messengers. In other words, "The people of the town told the messengers, 'We deem you an ill omen and swear that if you do not cease and desist from spreading your message, we will stone you or burn you, and severe torment will befall you from us.'"

قَالُوا طَائِرُكُمْ مَعَكُمْ أَئِن ذُكِّرْتُم بَلْ أَنتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(36:19) ***They said, "You augur evil omens about yourselves. What if you were reminded? You are a prodigal people!"***

Here, the messengers are replying to the townspeople.

You augur evil omens about yourselves* (ṭāʾirukum maʿakum)*: *Ṭāʾir* comes from the same root as *ṭayr* (bird). This is because people used to take omens from birds, and eventually the use of the word expanded from "inauspicious omens taken from birds" to mean "inauspicious omens in

general".[1] It can be used for what happens to people as well as just plain bad luck—which is something people imagine at first when they are having a rough time.

In either case, the surface meaning of *you augur evil omens about yourselves* is that these people should really consider themselves to be the ones with an evil portent looming over them, since they are the ones who are rejecting the truth—that is, the oneness of God—and instead turning towards falsehood (namely, polytheism).

Some exegetes say that *you augur evil omens about yourselves* means that their lot of fate—good or bad—arises from their own deeds. If they do good, then they have good luck. If they do evil, then they have bad luck. This interpretation uses the latter meaning of *ṭāʾir* (namely, "luck"). However, the next part of the verse—*What if you were reminded? You are a prodigal people!*—fits better with the first meaning.

What if you were reminded? This question is meant as a rebuke. *Reminded* means "being reminded of the truth"; that is, being reminded of the oneness of God, the return of all things to Him, and so on. The predicate of the conditional sentence is left unstated to suggest that uttering it might be inappropriate. It can be gleaned that it means something along the lines of: "If you were reminded of the truth, you would accept it with the same obstinacy that you apply to your ardent atheism and your flagrant atrociousness in proffering these omens and threats".

You are a prodigal people: Meaning, you cross the limits in your disobedience of God. This is an example of what came before. It means, "The main reason you are so stubborn in your rejection of the truth is that you are a people who are habitually immoderate and transgressive."

وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اتَّبِعُوا الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(36:20) ***A man came running from the outskirts of the city*** **(aqṣā al-madīna),** ***saying, "O my people! Follow the messengers."***

Aqṣā al-madīna means "the outer edge of the city". Although *qarya*

1 *Taṭṭayyur* shares same word root as "bird" because of the ancient Mediterranean practice of drawing omens from birds. A similar transmutation between words can be found between the English "augur" (meaning, "to engage in divination") which comes from the Latin *augur* (originally meaning "to take an omen from birds"). [Trans.]

was used before, now, the word *madīna* (city) is used instead to indicate its size and the man's efforts in rushing over.

A similar use is found in the story of Moses and the Copt:

And a man came running from the outskirts of the city (28:20).

In 28:20, the word *man* (rajul) comes first, whereas, in Sūrah Yā Sīn, it comes after the prepositional phrase.[1] Perhaps this is because, in the story of Moses, the important point is that the man came and told Moses that the people were conspiring to kill him; this was why he was there. Therefore, *man* comes first, and *running* comes second. However, here, in Sūrah Yā Sīn, the order is reversed. That is, what is more important is that the man came from the edge of the city, for this shows that he and the messengers could not have been colluding on their message. Thus, *from the outskirts of the city* comes first, and then *man* and *running* come later.

Exegetes have contended vigorously over the name of the man, the name of his father, and his profession or job. However, this does not concern us here because it is irrelevant to the intent of the verse. If such details were necessary to understand the verse, they would not have been omitted.

What is important is pondering upon his share of faith in the stance he stood up for, in supporting and aiding the messengers. His speech reflects the light of God in his heart, preceded by the light of faith—to believe in God and sincerely worship him, not just out of a desire for Heaven or out of fear of Hell, but rather because He is worthy of being worshipped. For that reason, he was one of those who was honored. Elsewhere, God has only used *honored* to describe the angels which are near Him and His true servants. He stood up against his people and debunked their rationale that stopped them from worshipping God and made them think they should worship demigods instead. Instead, he proved that they should worship God alone, and that the messengers were speaking the truth; then, he believed in them.

اتَّبِعُوا مَن لاَّ يَسْأَلُكُمْ أَجْرًا وَهُم مُّهْتَدُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

1 That is, in literal translation, the two verses say:
Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ: *And came a man from the outskirts of the city, running.* (28:20)
Sūrah Yā Sīn: *And came from the outskirts of the city a man, running.* (36:20)
However, in translation, the words were rearranged for ease of reading. [Trans.]

(36:21) ***Follow those who do not ask you for anything, and they are guided.***

This expounds upon *follow the messengers. Those who do not ask you for anything, and they are guided* is grammatically parallel to *messengers* in the previous verse (that is, it says whom they should *follow*). It explains why they should not listen to their townsman, either because: (a) their townsman was genuinely misguided, and it is not permissible to follow someone who is misguided, or (b) even if someone is telling the truth and it is necessary to follow the truth, one had ought not to heed someone with a corrupt agenda—for instance, someone seeking wealth or position. However, if someone is both speaking the truth and is absolved of any sort of corrupt agenda, plot, scheme, or treachery, then it is necessary to follow what that person says. And these messengers were guided by God in telling people to worship God alone. They did not seek any wealth or position in return. Therefore, it was necessary for the people to follow their words.

The fact that they put forward proof for their claim regarding divine unity shows that they were guided. This proof is given in these two verses, beginning with: *Why should I not serve the One who created me?* (36:22)

Their words—*Our Lord knows that we were sent to you as messengers* (36:16)—show that they did not seek anything in return; this has already been discussed. However, this point reinforces what we said earlier—that *Our Lord knows that we were sent to you as messengers* (36:16) indicates that they did not want anything in return from their people.

وَمَا لِيَ لَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾ أَأَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِهِ آلِهَةً إِن
يُرِدْنِ الرَّحْمَٰنُ بِضُرٍّ لَّا تُغْنِ عَنِّي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُنقِذُونِ ﴿٢٣﴾

(36:22–23) ***Why should I not serve the One who created me, and to whom you shall return? Shall I take gods other than Him? If the Merciful wished to harm me, none could prevent it through their intercession or save me.***

These two verses deliver the proof of the oneness of God and the denial of other deities. The verses are phrased as a person speaking to himself except for the interjection in the last line (*and to whom you [*pl.*] shall return*). This is because it is calling upon their shared human condition. Like all human beings, the speaker was fashioned by God and given

the same human nature (*fiṭra*) that all people share. Hence it says: *Why should I not serve the one who created me? Shall I take gods other than Him?* Rather than being specific to him personally, this has the universal meaning of, "And why should the human being not worship the one who created him? Should a human being take a god other than him?"

God is referred to as *the One who created me* to indicate causality; that is, because God has fashioned the human being out of nothingness, God has true ownership over the human being in all aspects—his person, characteristics, and deeds. The human being will return to Him. Therefore, the human being must necessarily and absolutely worship God. It is upon the human being to set himself to worshipping God and demonstrate it to God. This is worship in act—to worship God because He is worthy of it.

This is what we were alluding to earlier in saying that the man used to worship God sincerely, not seeking Heaven and not out of fear of Hell, but rather because He was worthy of worship.

Although faith and worship are for God alone, most people do not reach that level. Most of them worship out of fear or covetousness or for both reasons. After speaking from his own frame of reference, the man then addresses the people: *And to Him you shall return*. He does this to warn them about the day on which they will go back to Him, and that God shall take them to account for what they did and recompense them fairly for their deeds. *And to Him you shall return* is an interjection intervening in the main speech, or like an interjection.

Then the two verses offer proof that their arguments for polytheism were baseless, as was what they built atop those arguments such as their adoration of their idols and lords.

To explain further, they had maintained, "God, the Exalted, is above being perceived with the senses, imagination or intellect. None of your perceptive faculties can reach him. Therefore, it is impossible to worship Him. Therefore, we worship the nearest of His entourage and His mighty creatures like the honorable angels, the jinn, or the human saints so that they may intercede with us for God to bring about goodness and dispel misfortunes and adversities."

The crux of their first response is that even if God is too exalted for His essence to be comprehended intellectually, He can be known through His attributes, which are specific to Him, such as being the one who gave everything being and fashioned it out of nothing. Therefore, they should approach Him through these attributes; denying this possibility is just

being stubborn. This is what is alluded to in *And why should I not worship the one who created me?*

Second, even if these demigods could intercede for them, they would only be able to do that because God had gifted them with that ability. However, God would only grant them that capacity if it were part of His overarching will. They would also only be able to intercede in matters that God permits; as He says:

None can intercede without His permission (10:3).

But if God wills something firmly, their intercession will be moot, and they would hold no sway in changing His decree. Their demigods are impotent; they can neither attract goodness nor repel misfortune. That is what is conveyed in: *Shall I take gods other than Him? If the Merciful wished to harm me, none could prevent it through their intercession or save me.*

God is referred to as *the Merciful* (al-Raḥmān) to elucidate the vast and myriad nature of His mercy, and that all blessings come from Him. The administration of both good and ill rests with Him. From this arises another proof of the oneness of God in His Lordship: if all blessings and the cosmic order they subsist in are manifestations of His mercy and are administered by Him—to the point that even if He orders the angels to deliver some manifestations of His mercy, the angels are still under His dominion. Therefore, lordship and divinity are truly His alone.

إِنِّيٓ إِذًا لَّفِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

(36:24) ***"I would be in clear error."***

This evidences their error in taking other gods.

إِنِّيٓ ءَامَنتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ فَٱسْمَعُونِ ﴿٢٥﴾

(36:25) ***"I believe in your Lord, so hear me."***

Here, the man is speaking to the messengers. *Hear me* is a way of saying "bear witness", as is *I believe in your Lord*.

This reaffirms his profession of the truth and emphasizes the matter of faith. He says *I have believed in your Lord* after putting forward his arguments to the messengers so that they could bear witness to his faith and so that he could back them in their faith vis-à-vis the people who were listening.

Some exegetes say that he is speaking to the people in support of the

messengers. In this case, it could mean, "I believe in God, so listen to me, for it does not matter to me what will befall me from you due to that" or "I believe in God, so listen to me, and believe in Him". He could also have been trying to make the people angry at him in order to distract them from the messengers since he saw that they were about swoop down on them.

However, the problem here is that he is speaking of God as *your Lord*, whereas the people took their demigods as lords. [Therefore, it wouldn't make sense for him to tell the townspeople, "I believe in God, your lord" when they do not see God as their lord.] Some refute this objection by saying that what he really means is, "I believe in your Lord who established proof of His lordship for you, and He is God, exalted be He." However, nothing in the text indicates that "your Lord" should be limited to that meaning.

قِيلَ ادْخُلِ الْجَنَّةَ قَالَ يَا لَيْتَ قَوْمِي يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾ بِمَا غَفَرَ لِي رَبِّي وَجَعَلَنِي مِنَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(36:26–27) ***It was said to him: "Enter the garden." He said: "If only my people knew what my Lord has pardoned me for, and [how] my Lord has made me one of the honored*** **(mukramīn)*****."***

This is being said to the man. It hints that the people killed him, and so a voice from the heavens spoke to him and told him to enter the garden. This is supported by the succeeding text: *After him, we did not send down hosts from heaven, nor shall We ever send. It was but a single cry, and they were still.* (36:28–29). The clause *It was said to him: "Enter the garden"* indicates that he had been killed. It also shows that there was no lapse in time between him being killed and his being told to enter the garden. It is as if to say that his being killed at their hands was what led him to the garden.

The *garden* (jannah) here is the garden in the intermediary world (*barzakh*), not the Heaven of the hereafter. Some exegetes do say that this *garden* refers to the eternal Paradise, in which case it would mean, "Enter the garden on the day of resurrection", and that it was expressed in the past tense to show this will definitely happen. However, this is unfounded; there is no evidence for this. Some exegetes also say that God raised him to the heavens, and this is why it was said to him, "Enter the garden". Therefore, he is alive, abiding a blessed existence in it until the final hour; this is similarly unfounded.

Some exegetes say that, actually, the townspeople mocked him with *enter the garden* when killing him; that is, they were the ones to say this. However, this is out of place with what comes next, namely, *He said, "If only my people knew what my Lord has pardoned me for.…*" For, here, he is saying that he wished that his people knew what he had found after he was told "enter the garden". If he were told "enter the garden" while he was being killed, his wish would be out of place, and there is nothing in the context that would justify that statement.

If only my people knew what my Lord has pardoned me for, and [how] my Lord has made me one of the honored: Like the previous sentence, this answers an implied question. It is as if the following dialogue were to take place: "What happened after he stood up for the messengers?" "*It was said to him, 'Enter the garden.'*" "What next?" "He said, '*If only my people knew.…*'" Here, he is advising his people in death, just as he advised them in life.

The pronoun *mā* in *what* (mā) *my Lord has pardoned me for* introduces a gerund phrase (*mā maṣdariyyah*). *Has made me* (jaʿalanī) is parallel to the verb *pardoned* (ghafara) and linked to it with a conjunction. It means, "If only they knew how He has forgiven me; if only they knew how He has honored me."

God may grant honor to many, as in the following verses:

> *As for the human being, when his Lord tries him by granting him honor and blessings, he says, "My Lord has honored me."* (89:15)
>
> *The most honorable of you before Allah are the ones who are most conscious of Allah*. (49:13)

For when a servant of God is honored before God [as in verse 49:13], this is a form of honor from Him. However, only two groups of Gods creations can be said to be absolutely or unquestionably honored and be called *mukramīn* ("the honored ones"). The first group consists of the honored angels, as in:

> *Nay, they are honored servants. They do not precede Him in speech, and they do as they are told.* (21:27)

The second consists of those believers whose faith is complete, whether they are among the sincere (*mukhliṣīn*), as in:

> *They are in gardens, honored.* (70:35)

Or whether they are among the purified who have been made sincere

(*mukhlaṣīn*),[1] as in:

Except for His purified servants… they are honored. (37:40–42)

This verse is also used as one of the proofs of the *barzakh* (the intermediary realm after death, before the final resurrection and entrance into Heaven or Hell).[2]

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وَمَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِن بَعْدِهِ مِنْ جُندٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاء وَمَا كُنَّا مُنزِلِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(36:28) ***After him, we did not send down upon his people hosts from heaven*** **(wa mā anzalnā ʿalā qawmihi min baʿdihi min jundin min al-samāʾi)*****, nor shall We ever send.***

The pronoun *him/his* refers to the man. *After him* means "after he was killed". The first use of the pronoun *min* (often translated "from") is to indicate starting points (*ibtidāʾ al-ghāyah*, that is, from when and from where). The second use of second use of *min* is to emphasise "no" (that is, to emphasise "We will *not* be sending them!").

The verse paves the way for the next verse. It shows that divine vengeance was ordained for them and that God did not need any time to prepare angelic forces to assail them from the heavens. God neither did that then nor when He destroyed the ancient peoples. Instead, it was but a single cry that eradicated them.

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إِن كَانَتْ إِلاَّ صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ خَامِدُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(36:29) ***It was*** **(kānat)** ***but a single cry*** **(ṣayha wāḥida)*****, and they were still*** **(khāmidūn).**

Meaning, "What caused their destruction was Our will, nothing but

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1 According to Ayatollah Nasser Makarim Shirazi in *Tafsir Nemuneh*, the related words *mukhliṣ* and *mukhlaṣ* are similar in sound but convey significantly different meanings. *Mukhliṣ* speaks of a person who is sincere or devoted, whereas *mukhlaṣ* applies to a person who is at a higher level whereby Shaytan has lost hope of deceiving him. Thus, such a person could be described as "saved", "purified", or "having been made sincere" (a literal translation of *mukhlaṣ*). [Trans.]

2 This is because the man goes directly to an otherworldly garden prior to the Resurrection; therefore, it indicates that an otherworldly garden exists outside of the actual eternal Paradise which one enters after resurrection, judgment, and questioning. [Trans.]

a single cry."

The verb (*kānat*) is in the feminine form because the predicate (*single cry/ṣayha wāḥida*) is feminine. *Cry* (ṣayha) is indefinite and described as *single* to make it seem like a lone, insignificant thing. *Khāmidūn* means "to be at rest". This verse is distinct from the previous (as opposed to being conjoined by a conjunction) because it acts a is a reply to an implied question, as if someone were to ask "what destroyed them?" and the response were "a single cry".

It means, "The cause of their destruction was a simple matter—a single cry. Their sudden immobility took them by surprise. They fell still, neither hearing nor sensing; in the end, they were dead, unmoving."

يَا حَسْرَةً عَلَى الْعِبَادِ مَا يَأْتِيهِم مِّن رَّسُولٍ إِلاَّ كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِؤُون ﴿٣٠﴾

(36:30) ***Alas for [My] servants* (yā ḥasratan ʿalā al-ʿibād)*! Whenever a messenger comes to them, they mock him.***

Meaning, "Such regret for My servants!" The vocative form *yā ḥasratan ʿalā* (lit. "O, regret for them!") is more eloquent than just saying "it was regretful for them". The reason for this regret is explained next: *Whenever a messenger comes to them, they mock him.*

It can be gleaned from the verse that the intent behind *servants* (al-ʿibād) is human beings in general. It is all the more regretful—hence, the emphasis on "regret"—because human beings are servants [of God], and it is worse for a servant to reject his master's call and rebel against him than to just simply reject someone's sincere advice.

For that reason, it is clear that the following exegetical views are, simply put, silly:

Servants (al-ʿibād) refers to the messengers, angels, or both.

Servants (al-ʿibād) refers to humanity, and the one doing the regretting is the man.

It is clear that *Alas for [My] servants!* are God's words, not the man's last words.

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُم مِّنْ الْقُرُونِ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ لاَ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

(36:31) ***Do they not see how many generations before them We destroyed, such that they do not return to them?***

This upbraids those whom, in the previous verse, woe is betiding. *How*

many (kam) is elaborated on by *generations* (min al-qurūn).[1] *Qurūn* is the plural of *qarn*, meaning "the people of a single era".

That they do not return to them further explains *Do they not see how many generations before them We destroyed* (annahum ilayhim lā yarjiʿūn)*?* The first plural pronoun marker (*-hum*) refers to *generations* (al-qurūn), and the second (*-him*) and the third (*-ūn*) refer to *servants* (ʿibād). It means, "Do they not take heed of just how many past peoples were obliterated by divine punishment and could not go back to their luxurious ways?"

Exegetes have put forward other views regarding what the pronouns refer to, and what the verse means, but they have been omitted here because they are rather farfetched.

وَإِن كُلٌّ لَّمَّا جَمِيعٌ لَّدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(36:32) ***All of them shall surely be brought before Us*** **(wa in kullun lammā jamīʿun ladayna muḥḍarūn).**

The grammatical particle *in* [which introduces the verse but is not reflected in translation] is for negation. *Kull*^{un} is the subject. It ends with the grammatical marker -^{un} [that is, *kull*^{un}] because no nouns are appended to it. *Lammā* has the same meaning as *illā* ("except"). *Jamīʿ* means *majmūʿ* ("gathered", "altogether"). *Ladaynā* ("before Us") is a prepositional phrase describing what will happen to those who are gathered. *Muḥḍarūn* is a second predicate, after *jamīʿ*, although some exegetes have put forward the possibility that it is an adjective describing *jamīʿ*.

It means, "They will all, without exception, be gathered before Us for reckoning and recompense on the day of resurrection." The verse is similar in meaning to:

> *That is the day on which people will be gathered. That is the day which is witnessed.* (11:103)

Examining Narrations

(1) *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:

It is said that Jesus sent two of his disciples to Antioch. When they neared the city, they saw an old man herding his sheep. This was Ḥabīb, the man [who is mentioned in Sūrah] Yā Sīn. They

1 That is, it is not just a question of "how many?" "two or three" but rather "how many?" "generation after generation, era after era". [Trans.]

greeted him, and he asked them, "Who are you?"
They said, "We are messengers from Jesus, to call you away from worshipping idols towards worshipping the Merciful."
He asked, "Do you have any signs?"
They said, "Yes, we can heal the sick and cure the blind and the lepers, by the permission of God."
The old man said, "I have a son who has been ill and bedridden for years."
They said, "Take us to the house so we can examine him."
So he took them to the house, and they laid their hands over his son, and he stood, at that moment, by the permission of God, cured.
News of this spread throughout the city, and God healed many of their sick through their hands.
They [the people of Antioch] had a king who used to worship idols. When he heard about what had happened, he summoned them and asked, "Who are you?"
They said, "Messengers of Jesus. We have come to call you away from worshipping that which neither sees nor hears to worshipping that which sees and hears."
The king said, "We have a god other than the gods that we already have?"
They said, "Yes—the one who created you and your gods."
He said, "Depart, so that I may give thought to this." But the people seized them in the market and beat them.
Majmaʿ al-Bayān then relates from Wahab ibn Munabbih:
Jesus sent these two men to Antioch. They arrived but did not reach the king. Their wait grew long, until finally, one day, the king came out. They said, "God is great!" and remembered God. This angered the king, and he ordered that they be imprisoned and lashed a hundred lashes each.
After the two men were deemed as liars and beaten, Jesus sent Simon (Shimʿūn al-Ṣafā),[1] the head of the disciples, after them to aid them. Simon arrived, disguised, and began to mingle with the king's retinue until they recognized him and told the king, who summoned him. The king enjoyed Simon's company, took

1 Also known as Saint Peter. [Trans.]

him as a confidante, and honored him.
One day, Simon said to the king, "Your majesty! I have heard that you have imprisoned two men and beaten them for proselytizing a religion which is different from yours. Have you heard what they had to say?"
The king said, "Anger kept me from that."
He said, "If Your Majesty sees fit, call them to us, so that we can see what they have to offer."
So the king summoned them, and Simon asked them, "Who sent you two here?"
They said, "God, who is the creator of all things, and who has no partner."
Simon asked, "What gifts do you have?"
They said, "Whatever you wish."
So the king ordered that a blind boy be brought in. He was not just blind, but was completely eyeless and had nothing but a blank forehead. They kept praying to God until the place where his eyes should have been clove open, and then they took two little balls of clay and placed them in like irises. They became eyeballs that he could see with.
The king was amazed. Then Simon said to him, "Could you ask your god to craft a statue like this, so that it could bring honor to you and your people?"
The king said, "I have no secrets from you. The gods which we worship can bring no aid and no harm."
Then the king said to the two men, "If your god can raise the dead, I will believe in him and you."
They said, "Our God can do anything."
So the king said, "Here is the body of someone who died seven days ago but was not buried yet so that his father could return first. He went missing, and the body was found. It has now turned and gives off a putrid scent."
So they began praying aloud to their Lord, and Simon began to call upon his Lord silently. The dead person stood and said to them, "I died seven days ago and entered seven valleys of fire, and I warn you about what you are doing. Believe in God."
The king marvelled at this, and when Simon realized that these words had had an effect on the king, he called him to God, and

he believed and some of his subjects believed, whereas others did not.

Majmaᶜ then says:

ᶜAyyāshī relates a similar narration via al-Thumālī and others from Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq, except that some of the narrations say that God sent two men to Antioch and then sent a third. Some say that God revealed to Jesus that he should send them; then, after he sent them, he sent his legatee Simon to save them. Some say that the dead person who was raised was the king's son, and that he climbed out of his grave, shaking off the dirt from his head. The king said to him, "My son, what is your condition now?" He said, "I was dead, and I saw two men prostrating and beseeching God to bring me back to life." The king asked, "O my son, would you recognize them if you saw them?" He said, "Yes." So the king took some people to the desert and brought man after man by, until the king's son said, "This is one of them." Then the other passed by and the king's son recognized him and pointed to him. So the king and the people of his kingdom believed.

However, Ibn Isḥāq says, "The king did not believe and incited his people to kill the messengers. When Ḥabīb heard about that, he was at the farthest city gate, and so he came rushing to them advising them and urging them to obey the messengers."

Author's comments: Some of these narrations do not fit with the verses.

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related[1] that the Messenger of God said:

There were three truthful ones (*ṣiddīqūn*). One was Ḥabīb al-Najjār, the believer from the family of Yāsīn (*muᵓmin Āl Yāsīn*). He is the one who said, "*O my people! Follow the messengers*" (36:20). The second was Ḥizqīl, the believer from the people of the Pharaoh. He is the one who said, "*Would you kill a man for saying 'my Lord is Allah'?*" (40:28) The third is ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and he was the best of them.

Author's comments: Bukhārī relates this in his *Tarīkh* from Ibn ᶜAbbās.

1 Abū Dāwūd, Abū Nuᶜaym, Ibn ᶜAsākir, and al-Daylamī relate from this Abū Laylā.

In his words, "There were three truthful ones: Ḥizqīl, the believer from the people of the Pharaoh, Ḥabīb al-Najjār, the believer from the people of Yāsīn, and ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib."

(3) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, it is related from *Tafsīr al-Thaᶜlabī* with a chain of narration leading to ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Laylā that the Prophet said:

There are three pioneers of the nations. They never disbelieved in God, even for the blink of an eye. They are ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the man of Yāsīn, and the believer from the people of the Pharaoh. They are the truthful ones, and ᶜAlī is the best of them.

Author's comments: Something to this effect is also related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from al-Ṭabarāni and Ibn Mardawayh, although he has deemed weak the narration from Ibn ᶜAbbās. It says: "The forerunners are three: the one who preceded all in believing in Moses was Yūshaᶜ ibn Nūn, the one who preceded all in believing in Jesus was the man from the people of Yāsīn, and the one who preceded all in believing in Muḥammad was ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib."

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Verses 33–47

In the previous section, the verses told the story of the people of the town. They told of how they associated partners to God, denied the messengers, and belittled their mission. They were warned that divine punishment would descend upon them as it did to the ancient peoples who denied God, and that they would all be brought forth for reckoning and recompense.

Now, the verses turn to presenting the signs of the divine hand in the creation and management of the cosmos. These signs point to the divinity and lordship of God alone, with no partner. Then the verses censure them for failing to behold the signs of God's oneness or the resurrection, for turning away from them, and for mocking the truth and refraining from spending on the poor and destitute.

وَآيَةٌ لَهُمُ الْأَرْضُ الْمَيْتَةُ أَحْيَيْنَاهَا وَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهَا حَبًّا فَمِنْهُ يَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(36:33) ***And a sign for them is the dead earth; We revive it and bring forth from it grain, and, from it, they eat.***

Here and in the next two verses, God awakens people's awareness towards the signs of His lordship, especially how He looks after people's sustenance.

Here and in the next two verses, God reminds people of the signs of His lordship in how He looks after creation. *Eat* (yaʾkulūn) refers to the sustenance of people—feeding them with the fruits of the land in the form of fruit, grains, dates, grapes, and other edibles.

And a sign **(āya)** ***for them is the dead earth:*** At first glance, *sign* seems to be referring to *earth*. However, the next two sentences show how vegetative sustenance arises when the breath of life is blown onto the barren land, thereby becoming grains and fruits to eat. Therefore, *sign* more correctly refers to *dead earth*, because it is upon the barren land that these signs manifest, with food springing to life.

[We] bring forth from it grain: Meaning, "We cause plants with grains—like wheat, barley, rice and other foodstuffs—to sprout from the earth."

And from it **(minhu)*****, they eat:*** This is the result of bringing forth

grain; it shows the fruition of the divine plan in providing sustenance. *It* (*-hu* in *minhu*) refers to *grain*.

وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا جَنَّاتٍ مِن نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ وَفَجَّرْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ الْعُيُونِ ﴿٣٤﴾

(36:34) ***And We have placed therein orchards*** **(jannāt)** ***of palm*** **(nakhīl)** ***and grape*** **(aʿnāb)** ***and caused springs*** **(ʿuyūn)** ***to gush forth.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> A *jannah* is an orchard which has so many trees that the ground is covered with trees.

Nakhīl is the plural of *nakhl* (meaning "palm tree"). *Aʿnāb* is the plural of *ʿinab* (typically "grape"), and is used for fruit-bearing vines and their fruit.

Al-Rāghib says:

> *ʿAyn* [sing. of *ʿuyūn*] originally meant "wound". (…) It later became used for various things that appear to be split open. (…) It was coined for springs of water because of the similarity in appearance.

*Gushing forth (*fajjarnā*) in the earth* means for it to split open and the water to burst out. Everything else is clear.

لِيَأْكُلُوا مِن ثَمَرِهِ وَمَا عَمِلَتْهُ أَيْدِيهِمْ أَفَلا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(36:35) ***So that they may eat*** **(li-yaʾkulū)** ***of its fruits. And their hands did not make it. Will they then not give thanks?***

The *l-* in *li-yaʾkulū* indicates that this verse expresses the result of the verse that came before it—that is, "We put gardens in it and sprung forth springs so that people can eat from its fruits."

Of its fruits **(min thamarihi)*:*** Some exegetes say that the pronoun *its* (*-hi* in *thamarihi*) refers to the actual placing of the gardens [as opposed to just the word "gardens"], since the pronoun *-hi* is singular and masculine, whereas *gardens* itself would be referred to by the pronoun *-hā* [used for a plural inanimate object], and the *palm* and *grape* would be referred to by the dual pronoun *-hummā*.

Other exegetes say that the pronoun refers to the word *madhkūr* (what was described) and acts as a demonstrative pronoun, as in these verses

by Ruʾba:[1]

On it are lines of black and white
As if it were a zebra-striped skin

It has been related that Abū ʿUbaydah asked Ruʾba why he used [the singular] *ka-annahu* [to refer to two things, "black" and "white"], and he said it was because *ka-annahu* can mean *kana dhāk* ["it was such"].

There are also other baseless views on what *it* refers to in *of its fruits*. For instance:

It refers only to *palm trees*.

It refers to the water of the springs, or to something elided that means "spring water".

It refers to "gushing forth" (*tafjīr*, the verbal noun of *fajjarnā*)

According to both of these views, *fruits* means "something beneficial or useful" [as in the English "fruits of one's labor"].

There is the view that it refers to God, and it is appended to *fruits* since He is their creator and owner.

***And their hands did not make it* (wa mā ʿamilat aydīhim):** The verb ʿ*amila* means "doing" (*faʿala*). The difference between these ʿ*amila* and *faʿala*—according to al-Rāghib—is that ʿ*amila* is usually used for intentional actions aimed at accomplishing a goal. Therefore, it is not usually used for animals or inanimate objects. Similarly, ʿ*amila* is associated with good and evil; that is, one can use it to say one "works good" or "works evil", but this cannot be done with *faʿala*.

Mā here means "not". It means that they did not create the fruits with their own hands, that they might thereby stake a claim to managing the distribution of sustenance along with God. Rather, God alone is the one who creates these things and brings their distribution to fruition, without any assistants. So why are they not thankful?

This interpretation is strengthened by the verses near the end of this sūrah, in which He describes how He created quadrupeds for them as part of His system of providing them sustenance: *Do they not see that We created livestock for them—by Our own hands—and given them control over them? And We have subjected them to them, so some of them, they ride;*

1 Ruʾba ibn al-ʿAjjāj, a famous 8th century CE poet from a Bedouin background who later settled in Basra and whose poetry is often cited as a reference for grammar and word usage. [Trans.]

and others, they eat. And they find other advantages and milk in them—will they not be grateful? (36:71–73)

Some exegetes have introduced the possibility that *mā* in *mā ʿamilat* means "what" and relates back to *fruits* (thamarihi). [That is, instead of meaning *their hands did not make* it, it means *what they make by their own hands.*] In this case, it would mean, "So that they may eat from its fruits and what they make from these fruits with their own hands, such as vinegar and date syrup, which they produce from grapes, dates, and so on."

Even those some exegetes have preferred this view over the previous one, it is incorrect. This is because the underlying aim of the verses is to demonstrate divine lordship by mentioning specific aspects of divine management. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to finish off the argument by mentioning someone else's efforts. True, one could mention human efforts on the grounds that the human ability to work is a gift from God to His creation and still part of His overall means of managing things. However, in that case, it would have been more appropriate to say something along the lines of "and what We have gifted them to work with" in order to dispel any hint of partnership (*shirk*) in how God administers the cosmos.

Some exegetes have also proffered the view that *mā* is an open-ended relative pronoun in conjunction with *fruits*, rather than referring to *fruits* directly, thereby rendering the meaning, "So that they may eat from its fruits and from what their hands have wrought." However, this view can be rejected for the same reason as the previous.

Will they then not give thanks? This rebukes them. How distasteful is their thanklessness towards God! He has set forth the divine order in how He manages creation. They could thank God for the divine blessings verbally or in acts. For instance, as His servants, they could express gratitude for being under His administration through acts of worship, confessing to His lordship, or acknowledging Him as divinity to be worshipped.

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا تُنبِتُ الْأَرْضُ وَمِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَمِمَّا لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(36:36) ***Glory be to the One who created the pairs, all of them—of what the earth grows, and of their own selves, and of what they know not.***

This establishes that God is free of defects or needs. Previously, it lamented their deficiency in gratitude towards him for the sustenance He created for them, such as grains and fruits. He created them in pairs, as this verse says:

And We made grow in it of every verdant pair (50:7).

However, His creation is so vast that He did not just create plant life in pairs; rather, He fashioned everything in the universe as pairs (active and passive, male and female, or positive and negative), including human beings, animals, and plants, wherein the male and female couple to produce a third. However, God is above that:[1] *Glory be to the one who created the pairs, all of them*….

Glory be to the one who created the pairs, all of them: This is an exclamation glorifying the greatness of God, rather than just an informative statement.

***Of what the earth grows* (min mā tunbitu al-arḍ):** This refers to the various pairs of plant life that grows from the earth. Likely, it also encompasses animal life. For instance, God says regarding the human being—and the human being is a type of animal—*And Allah caused you to grow from the earth* (anbatakum min al-arḍi anbātan), that is, the same word root as above) (71:17). Perhaps, animals are not mentioned—even though they also are earth-creatures—because it is glaringly obvious that they come in pairs, whereas this is less obvious for plants.

And of their own selves: Meaning, human beings.

And of what they know not: Meaning, the things that human beings are wholly unaware of, or which they know little about, or whose means of procreation they are unaware of.

Some exegetes maintain that *pairs* here means "type and subtype" or "genus and species" [thereby interpreting the verse as meaning, "Glory be to the one who created all types of things"]. However, this is not supported by a similar verse mentioning "pairs" (*azwāj*, sing *zawj*), which says: *And We created pairs of all things, so that you might be mindful* (51:49). *Zawj* gives the sense of things which are compatible and coupled.

1 That is, God does not need an "other half" or a mate; while the female lacks some aspects of the male and the male lacks some aspects of the female, there is nothing in existence to complement or complete God, for He is perfect and singular. This is how, or one of the ways, that the verse removes any possibility of defect or shortcoming from God. [Trans.]

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Zawj* ("pair") is used for male and female animals. It is also used for other things that come in pairs, such as socks and sandals, as well as any sets of two things that are coupled together, whether they are similar or inverted. From *We created pairs* (zawjayn, 51:49), it can be deduced that everything in the world is paired or coupled, whether or not the two members of the pair are identical, have an opposing interface, or are compound, and nothing in the world is free from one type of combination or the other.

Half of *zawj* [such as a mitten] cannot reach its full potential without its other half. This is why it is called "one of a pair"—because it requires its other half. Similarly, pairs that mate are also referred to as *zawj*, because they require their other half to produce a third entity.

وَآيَةٌ لَّهُمُ اللَّيْلُ نَسْلَخُ مِنْهُ النَّهَارَ فَإِذَا هُم مُّظْلِمُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(36:37) ***And a sign for them is the night. We strip* (naslakhu) *the day from it, and—behold!—they are plunged into darkness.***

This depicts another sign of God's lordship, displaying the presence of divine management throughout the human world. It is discussed across four verses.

Without doubt, this verse depicts how night suddenly falls as daylight disappears. The verb *naslakhu* usually means "extract" or "strip" and takes the preposition *ʿan*, as in the sentence "I stripped (*salakhtu*) the hide from (*ʿan*) the sheep." Here, *naslakhu* means "taking away"; for that reason, in this verse, it takes the preposition *min* rather than *ʿan*.[1]

This understanding is affirmed by the Qur'anic usage elsewhere describing how night and day follow on the heels of each other; for instance:

> *He causes the night to enter (*or "be inserted into"*) the day and the day to enter the night*. (22:61)

Since day is described as being inserted into the night, it makes sense here that the sudden fall of night would be described as "removing" the day from the night.

It is as if, at nightfall, its darkness surrounds them; then, daybreak penetrates it and surrounds them with its light. Then, the daylight vanishes,

1 Note that the shade of meaning of "strip" was retained in translation. [Trans.]

and night seizes them again with darkness permeating all that had once been in the light of day. This sort of expression can also be taken figuratively or metaphorically.

What we have said may suffice with respect to the reams that have been written upon the meaning of *naslakhu* with respect to night and day.

وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَّهَا ذَٰلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ ﴿٣٨﴾

(36:38) ***And the sun runs to*** **(tajrī)** ***its own dwelling place; that is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing.***

Tajrī here means "moves to" [here, translated as "runs to"].

Its own dwelling place **(li-mustaqarr**[in] **lahā)***: Li-* means "towards" or "for the purpose of". *Mustaqarr* is either a verbal noun formed with the letter *mīm* (maṣdar mīmī), or else a verbal noun showing where or when something happens (*ism makān* or *ism zamān*). It means that it moves towards its resting place or until it reaches its resting place—either until its end comes, or until it is time for sunset, or until it sinks to the horizon.

From where we are standing, the sun appears to be circling the earth. However, scientific research has determined that it is the opposite and that the sun actually travels towards the star Vega.

In any case, the verse tells us that the sun will not cease moving so long as the world and its order persist. When it comes to rest, the end of this world will ensue. This is in line with an alternate reading of this verse, attributed to Ahl al-Bayt and some others: *and the sun runs, with no rest* [*wa al-shams tajrī lā mustaqarra lahā* instead of *wa al-shams tajrī li-mustaqarra lahā*].

Some have suggested that this verse could be speaking of the rotation of the sun along its own axis; however, this does not fit with the verb *tajrī*, which implies motion from place to place.

That is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing: The motion of the sun is but an example of the divine decree and management which none can overrule or find fault with, for He knows all aspects of what is beneficial in His acts.

وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَّرْنَاهُ مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ ﴿٣٩﴾

(36:39) ***And We have ordained for the Moon its phases*** **(manāzil)** ***until she goes back to being like an old, dry palm branch*** **(al-ʿurjūn**

al-qadīm).

Manāzil is the plural of *manzil*. It is a noun of place from the verb *n-z-l* (meaning "to come to rest at", "to descend to"). Here, it refers to the 28 phases of the moon which the moon progresses through in each lunar cycle, which is roughly 28 days and nights long.[1]

ʿUrjūn refers to the stalks of the palm tree that hang down with the weight of new clusters of dates on them. They are yellow and bow-shaped like the crescent moon. *Qadīm* means "old".

There are various views over the meaning of the verse which center on differing understandings of its composition. The most apt view is the one which says that the verb *qaddarnāhu* [here translated "ordained", as in *We have ordained for it its phases*] means "We have ordained its phases" [as in the translation] or "We have ordained its phases until it returns to a crescent which looks like an old, dry, yellow palm stalk."

The verse refers to the varying forms that the moon takes from the perspective of earthlings. This is because it takes its light from the sun, and about half of its sphere is lit. The other half never sees sunlight and is perpetually cast into darkness. Then the places which the sun shine on vary, and this continues until it returns to its original form, which the people of the earth see as a crescent. Then it waxes into a full moon and then wanes into what it was before.

The cycle of the moon has various clear effects on nature, the oceans, and human life, as relevant studies have shown.

The verse describes the moon specifically as a wondrous sign for the people of the earth, not its condition in and of itself, or its condition only with respect to the sun. [That is, the phases of the moon can only be seen from the earth.]

With this in mind, it is not unreasonable to interpret *and the sun runs to its own dwelling place* (36:38) as referring to what people's senses perceive

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1 *Manāzil* is used in Arabic for both the phases of the moon and the mansions of the moon. Some translators render *manāzil* as "mansions of the moon". However, this seems less correct here—and is not ʿAllāmah's view of the meaning of the verse—since "mansions" refers to the position of the moon vis-à-vis the stars, whereas "phases" refers to the shape of the moon (that is, its progress from being a new moon, to a crescent moon, to a half moon, to a full moon, and so on, regardless of where it is in the sky). The latter seems to match the import of the verse better. [Trans.]

with respect to the sun's daily, seasonal, and yearly motion—that is, how the sun appears to us [rather than how it inherently is, or its motion with respect to the galaxy]. *Its own dwelling place* would then refer to how, from its own vantage point, the sun is essentially stationary vis-à-vis the earth. It is as if the verse were to say, "And a sign for them is the sun. It sees itself at rest, but, in their view, it rises and crosses the sky. The Mighty, Knowing one has arrange for that as part of the order of life on earth to care for its inhabitants." And God knows best.

لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنبَغِي لَهَا أَن تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(36:40) ***Neither may*** **(lā yanbaghī)** ***the sun overtake the moon, nor may the night outrace the day—each glides in its orbit.***

The expression *la yanbaghī* means "it does not behove it" or "it is not suitable for it". Here, it means that it does not behove the sun to catch up with the moon, for the divine ordering of the cosmos does not run on some days but not others. Rather, the divine ordering of the cosmos is perpetual with no disorder and no violation, until the appointed time comes for it to end.

It means that the sun and moon have their own paths. The sun cannot spring ahead of the moon, thereby violating the divine order that it has been set in, nor can the night outrace the day. They are both sequential in the divine order. Night and day may approach each other, but they cannot outpace each other, such that there would be two sequential nights or two sequential days; rather, they alternate.

The verse speaks of the sun not overtaking the moon, rather than vice versa, because the sun is the stronger of the two. Similarly, the verse speaks of the night not overtaking the day, rather than vice versa, because the night is the absence of the day. This is a rhetorical device aimed at calling attention to the preservation of the divine order from any sort of chaos or disintegration; therefore, it disallows the things that are bigger and stronger from overtaking that which is weaker. It should be apparent that if the stronger cannot overtake the weaker, then the weaker cannot overtake the stronger (namely, the moon cannot overtake the sun, and the day cannot overtake the night); therefore, it is not necessary to say it.

Each glides in its orbit **(falak)*:*** Meaning, that the sun, the moon, and

other things, such as the stars and planets, have their own celestial paths which they "swim" through like fish swimming in water. A *falak* is the orbital path in space that a celestial body moves through. It is not unlikely that *each* (*kull*, also meaning "all") refers to the sun, the moon, the night, and the day, even though there is no specific indication of that in the text.

The verses employ plural verbs which are restricted to sentient beings.[1] Perhaps this is to show that they are willingly compliant with the divine will; this is similar to how they are described as sentient beings in:

> *Then He directed himself to the sky, and it was like smoke. He said to it and the earth, "Come willingly or unwillingly." They said, "We come willingly."* (41:11)

There are other views about the sentences of this verse; however, we have omitted them because some of these views are truly confused. Whoever wishes to peruse them can consult the relevant books.

وَآيَةٌ لَّهُمْ أَنَّا حَمَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ فِي الْفُلْكِ الْمَشْحُونِ ﴿٤١﴾

(36:41) ***And a sign to them is that We bore their offspring*** **(dhuriyyatahum)** ***in the laden ark*** **(al-fulk al- mashḥūn).**

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Dhuriyyah* originally meant "small children" and later came to refer to both old and young [children]. It is used for both one and many, whereas, originally, it was used only for a group [of small children].

A *fulk* is a ship; *mashḥūn* means "full".

This is another sign of divine lordship—namely, the workings of divine management in the ocean when it carries people in laden ships and allows them to travel from place to place for the sake of trade or other purposes. No one but God can keep the ship aloft or protect it from sinking. When crossing the sea, they are taking advantage of how God has put certain aspects of the natural world under their control—albeit the root cause of their ability to do this is God, without whom they would be unable to do it.

It speaks of their descendants being carried in the ships, rather than themselves—that is, it does not say "I bore *them* in ships"—to kindle an

1 In Arabic, plurals of inanimate objects generally take a feminine singular verb, not a plural verb. [Trans.]

appreciation for divine compassion and mercy.

وَخَلَقْنَا لَهُم مِّن مِّثْلِهِ مَا يَرْكَبُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(36:42) ***And We created similar things for them on which they ride.***

According to exegetes, this refers to riding animals, as in:

> *And He Who created pairs of all things, and made for you of the ships and the cattle what you ride on.* (43:12)
> *And they are borne upon them* [quadrupeds] *and upon ships.* (40:80)

Some exegetes maintain that the ship referred to in the previous verse is Noah's ark, and that this verse refers to other types of ships and boats that were used after it. This is a rather unsophisticated view, as are similar views, such as the view that says that this verse specifically refers to camels.

Possibly, this verse can be taken to encompass airplanes and other aeronautical ships used these days; in fact, a general interpretation of the verse is better.

وَإِن نَّشَأْ نُغْرِقْهُمْ فَلا صَرِيخَ لَهُمْ وَلا هُمْ يُنقَذُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(36:43) ***And if We willed, we could drown them, and they would find no help*** **(ṣarīkh)** ***and no rescue*** **(wa lā hum yunqadhūn).**

Ṣarīkh is what happens when someone calls for help and is saved. *Yunqadhūn* means "being saved from drowning" (wa lā hum yunqadhūn).

This verse is connected via a conjunction to the verse which says *We bore their offspring in the laden ark* (36:41), meaning that, "Things happen according to Our will. If We willed, We could have let them drown, and none could have saved them or rescued them from the water."

إِلاَّ رَحْمَةً مِّنَّا وَمَتَاعًا إِلَى حِينٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

(36:44) ***Except as a mercy from Us and enjoyment for a time.***

This is framed as an exception—that is, they would not be saved by any material cause or anything unless the mercy of God reaches them so that they can persist until their fixed ends decreed for them.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّقُوا مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَمَا خَلْفَكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(36:45) ***And when it is said to them, "Guard against what is before you and what is behind you, that you may be granted mercy."***

Now that the previous verses have enumerated various signs of God's lordship, these verses turn to censuring those people who stubbornly refuse to heed or acknowledge the truth. They remain unmoved, even though these clear, lucid signs are related to them, proving that their lord is God. They should be mindful of their current transgressions as well as their past crimes—what is before them and what is behind them. They should be mindful of how they are now associating partners with God, transgressing in this world and facing divine wrath in the next. However, instead, they turn away from them, unresponsive to what has been patiently outlined to them in the previous verses.

Two points can be gleaned from this. First, that the intent behind "what is behind you and what is before you" means either (a) associating partners with God and disobeying God—things that they are presently tried with and were tried with before, or (b) the punishment which they have earned and which will be the only result, or (c) transgression in this world and punishment in the hereafter. The latter view is the best.

Second, the verse simply says *when it is said to them* and leaves the resulting clause to the audience's imagination. [That is, "when it is said to them… what happens?"] This is to emphasize their audacity before God and their mockery of the truth. What words could express the situation when someone calls them to the truth and to be mindful of God, and, in return, they abandon that person? The next verse indicates that this is what happened: *Whenever the signs of their Lord come to them, they turn away from them* (36:46).

وَمَا تَأْتِيهِم مِّنْ آيَةٍ مِّنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلاَّ كَانُوا عَنْهَا مُعْرِضِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(36:46) ***Whenever the signs of their Lord come to them, they turn away from them.***

These verses could either be referring to seeing the signs of God, or hearing the verses about them and contemplating them. Beyond that, it could be referring to the signs present in the natural world and in their own selves. It could also be referring to miracles, such as the Qur'an; they are turning away from them all.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَنفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ قَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
أَنُطْعِمُ مَن لَّوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ أَطْعَمَهُ إِنْ أَنتُمْ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٤٧﴾

(36:47) ***And when it is said to them, "Spend of what Allah has gifted you," those who deny [Allah] say to those who believe, "Should we feed those whom Allah could feed, if He willed? You are clearly astray."***

The previous verses showed their reply when they were called to worship God. This verse shows their reply when they were called to be compassionate to the creation of God. These two acts are the two pillars of the true religion. It can be deduced that their response was in the negative.

And when it is said to them, "Spend of what Allah has gifted you": This encompasses the call to them to spend their wealth on the poor and needy. In describing their wealth as something which God has provided them, it shows that the true owner of this wealth is God who has granted it to them as sustenance and has true ownership over it. He is the one who created the poor and needy and placed it upon their shoulders to provide for them out of what they have given, not to be miserly but rather to spend graciously and handsomely. For God loves goodness and beautiful acts.

Those who deny [Allah] say to those who believe, "Should we feed those whom Allah could feed, if He willed?" This is how they replied when they were called to spend on others. The context here would require the use of a pronoun; however, direct speech is used instead (*those who deny*) to show that their disbelief, turning away from the truth, and following their base desires are what led them to make excuses like this. Such excuses are built on their refusal to accept the compassion for others and the desire for social reform that their divinely oriented inner nature (*fiṭrah*) calls them to. Similarly, using direct speech for "Those who believe" [instead of pronoun] is to show that *spend of what Allah has gifted you* is said by *those who believe*.

"Should we feed those whom Allah could feed, if He willed?" This gives the sense that the believers told the disbelievers *spend of what Allah has gifted you* to show that being charitable is part of the natural order of things that God wills and wishes. However, the disbelievers retorted that God's act does not lag behind His will; were it His will to feed them—meaning, to grant them sustenance—He would already have made them

rich.

This is just sophistry. The disbelievers are blurring the boundaries between the clear divine legislative will (*irādah tashrīʿiyyah*) and the divine creational will (*irādah takwīniyyah*). The divine legislative will is designed to test people and to lead them to a happy life, in this world and in the next. By nature, it can be disobeyed. However, the divine creational will cannot be violated; God's will is done. It is obvious that God intends for those who can to share with the less fortunate and has ordained this as part of his legislative will. However, He has not enforced it as part of His creational will; therefore, people have the choice to obey or disobey. The disbelievers' response shows that they are simply being stubborn and rebellious in choosing to abstain from what God has decreed, not that there was some sort of lapse in God's will; their claim to that effect is a lie.

Their quarrels in their years of idol-worshipping were founded on this sort of sophistry. God speaks of it in:

> *And those who associate partners [with Allah] say: "If Allah had willed, we would not have served anything besides Allah, neither we nor our fathers, nor would we have prohibited anything without [an order from] Him."* (16:35)
>
> *Those who are polytheists will say: "If Allah had willed, we would not have associated [anything with Allah], nor our fathers, nor would we have forbidden [anything arbitrarily].* (6:148)
>
> *And they said, "If the Merciful had willed, we would never have worshipped them."* (43:20)

You are clearly astray: This is how the disbelievers finished off their retort to the believers. It means, "You are clearly erring when you claim that God has ordered us to give charity and has willed that from us."

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is narrated from ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn [Imām al-Sajjād], Imām al-Bāqir, and Imām al-Ṣādiq: *And the sun runs to its own dwelling place* (36:38) is read as *lā mustaqarra lahā,* with an *-a* vowel after the final *r*.[1]

(2) In *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related that Abū Dharr said:[2]

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1 See ʿAllāma's mention of an alternate reading of verse 36:38 in the above discussion on that verse.

2 It is related from Saʿīd ibn Manṣur, Aḥmad al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd,

I asked the Messenger of God about the verse *And the sun runs to its own dwelling place* (36:38). He said, "Its dwelling place (*mustaqirr*) is beneath the Throne."

Author's comments: This idea is narrated from the Prophet via Abū Dharr through both Sunni and Shi'I chains of narration, full and abridged. Some of these narrations say that, after the sun sets, it ascends from one level of heaven to the next until it reaches the spot right below the throne, and then it prostrates and seeks permission to rise. It continues doing this until it is clad in light and it is given permission to rise.

Even if the narration is authentic, it should be taken metaphorically or esoterically.

(3) In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, in a chain of narration from Salām ibn Mustanīr, it is related that Imām al-Bāqir said:
God, the Mighty and Glorious, created the sun before the moon, and the light before the dark.

(4) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, it is related from al-ᶜAyyāshī from his *Tafsīr*, from al-Ashᶜath ibn Ḥātim:
I was in Khurasān when [Imām] al-Riḍa, al-Faḍl ibn Sahl, and al-Maʾmūn met in al-Īrwān in Marw, and he hosted a meal.
Imām al-Riḍā said, "A Jewish man in Medina asked me whether night or day was created first. What do you say?"
We talked about it, and our conversation went around in circles, but did not come up with anything. So al-Faḍl said to al-Riḍā, "Tell us about this, may God set you aright."
Imām al-Riḍā said, "All right. A response from the Qur'an or through calculations?"
Al-Faḍl said, "Through calculations."
Imām al-Riḍā said, "You know, Faḍl, that if the rising sign at the beginning of the world was Cancer, and the planets were in their exaltation—Saturn in Libra, Jupiter in Cancer, Mars in Capricorn, the Sun in Aries, Venus in Pisces, Mercury in Virgo, and Moon in Taurus—then the Sun would have been in the tenth [astrological] house at its highest point in the sky [thereby making it daytime].[1]

Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Abū al-Shaykh, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī.

1 This relates to a similar idea, tracing back to ancient Greece and known in English as Thema Mundi, of there being a theoretical and idealized astrological

Therefore, the day came before the night. And the Qur'an says *nor may the night outrace the day* (36:40)—meaning that night was preceded by day.'"

Author's comments: Al-Ālūsī relates this narration in *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* then adds, "using the verse as argument is disputable. However, there are some issues with how it deals with the subject of calculations although it has some merit. The astronomers also held that the beginning of the cycle is at the meridian. Imām al-Riḍā's answer agrees with this. However, it seems most likely that the narration is unsound, for Imām al-Riḍā would have been above using astronomers' claims to 'prove' a Qur'anic verse."

However, al-Ālūsī was unable to correctly understand the meaning of night and day; otherwise, he would not have questioned the validity of the narration.

Clarification: Night and day are two opposites based on the concept of having something and lacking something in a subject which is susceptible to both. They are similar to being sighted versus being unsighted. Someone or something that is blind is not just something that lacks eyesight. For instance, a wall is not referred to as "blind" even though it lacks eyes. A being, such as a human, is only described as blind if it is otherwise expected to see. Thus is night. "Night" does not refer to any and every condition of being lightless; rather, it refers to the specific situation where the sun is no longer overhead shining down its rays on a particular place. Thus, it is obvious that lacking such a quality [like eyesight, or sunlight], needs to be preceded by the existence of that quality to make the opposites. They are in fact defined by each other. Were there no such thing as eyesight, there would be no such thing as blindness; and were there no such thing as day, there would be no such thing as night.

"Night", in its absolute sense, means "that which is preceded by the day". Whenever someone speaks of night in an unqualified manner, the listener assumes that there was a preceding day. in the sentence, *nor may the night outrace the day*; if one looks at the natural order between day and night, no night can come before its preceding day.

However, God has said, *nor may the night outrace the day*. This is an absolute statement regarding the night not being able to outrace the day.

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chart for the beginning of the world, with the rising sign as Cancer. However, in the Thema Mundi, the planets are in different zodiacal signs (their ruling signs rather than their exaltations). [Trans.]

He did not say "if one night were to occur in this sequence, it would not outstrip the sequence of the day before it."

Therefore, the natural law given in the verse is built upon the essential nature of night and day as opposites, as God has made them. Because of this essential nature, night and day alternate. Since night, by definition, lacks day—which is what it follows—it cannot come first. This is what Imām al-Riḍā alludes to after he cites the verse. It means that day coming before night is a creational matter; that is, day must have been created before night. It is not as some imagine—that day and night existed independently, and then each was put in its place.

Al-Ālūsī's comment—"However, there are some issues with how it deals with the subject of calculation. Imām al-Riḍā's explanation via calculations has some merit"—does not make sense. Imām al-Riḍā's explanation is not just acceptable; it is completely correct. However, it is necessary to have a firm grounding in the principles of astronomy to see that.

Smilarly, Al-Ālūsī is inaccurate when he says, "Astronomers also held that the beginning of the cycle is at the meridian. Imām al-Riḍā's answer agrees with this." The meridian is defined as the circle passing through the two poles and hypothetical infinite points between the two. So there is no particular point for it in the sky in such a way that the day happens when the sun is in that point.

(5) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, it says regarding *And when it is said to them, "Guard against what is before you and what is behind you"* (36:45) that it is narrated from al-Ḥalabī that Abī ᶜAbdillah [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said:

"What is behind you" means "sins", and "what is before you" is the consequences.

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Verses 48–65

The previous section elaborated on the signs of divine unity that were alluded to in the introductory verses. Now, these verses proceed to an explanation of the hereafter—how the final hour will come, how they will be brought forward for accounting and reward what will happen to the dwellers of the Garden and the guilty. All of expands on the basic picture of the hereafter that has already been introduced.

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(36:48) ***And they say, "When will this threat come to pass, if you be truthful?"***

They disbelievers are mocking them because they cannot fathom that there is any truth to what is being said. Perhaps the relative pronoun *hādhā* ("this") is used to imply that the last day is near [either in time, or in mind], for the Prophet and believers often used to hear about the hereafter and warn them about it. When the promise (*waʿd*) of the hereafter is mentioned alone, it encompasses both the promise of bliss and the promise of torment. When it is contrasted with its opposite (*waʿīd*), *waʿd* refers to eternal happiness, and *waʿīd* refers to eternal misery.

مَا يَنظُرُونَ إِلاَّ صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً تَأْخُذُهُمْ وَهُمْ يَخِصِّمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(36:49) ***They are waiting for*** **(yanẓurūn)** ***nothing but a single cry*** **(ṣayḥa)** ***which shall overtake them while they wrangle*** **(yakhtaṣimūn).**

Yanẓurūn means "to await" or "to be on the lookout for". The *ṣayḥa* (according to the context of the verses) is the first trumpet blast.[1] It is described as a "single cry" to show how minute their matters are before God—glorified be His might. He needs nothing more to bring about their doom. *Yakhtaṣimūn* is from the root *kh-ṣ-m* and means "to argue" or "to

1 The Qur'an speaks of two blows of the trumpet, one at the end of the world, and another at the beginning of the hereafter, as the next verse mentions. [Trans.]

quarrel".

In the previous verse, the disbelievers mocked and belittled the final hour by saying *"when will this threat come to pass, if you be truthful?"*. This verse replies with a similar tone and makes light of them in turn. They may be asking [in jest] when it will happen, but they are really waiting for nothing but a single blast, which is easy for God; it is no effort for Him, and He requires no assistance in seizing them. Then, they will have nowhere to run to save themselves. At present, they are heedless of it, simply wrangling between themselves.

فَلا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ تَوْصِيَةً وَلا إِلَى أَهْلِهِمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(36:50) ***Then they will not be able to make any bequests or return to their people.***

This cry will take them by surprise, and they will be faced with sudden death. They will have no chance to make a bequest: neither will there be time for that, nor will there be anyone left to make a bequest to, for they shall all be taken at once. Those who are outside will have no chance to return home.

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَإِذَا هُم مِّنَ الأَجْدَاثِ إِلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَنسِلُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

(36:51) ***And the trumpet shall be blown, and—behold!—they shall hasten*** **(yansilūn)** ***from their graves*** **(ajdāth)** ***to their Lord.***

This will be the second blow of the trumpet, upon which the dead will be raised. *Ajdāth* is the plural of *jadath*, meaning "grave". *Yansilūn* means "to walk quickly". Here, paired with *to their Lord*, it is a sort of reproval, in that they had disliked the notion of divine lordship [but now they will be forced to hasten to their Lord]. The rest of the verse is clear.

قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا مَن بَعَثَنَا مِن مَّرْقَدِنَا هَذَا مَا وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَٰنُ وَصَدَقَ الْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(36:52) ***They will say, "Woe be upon us! Who has raised us*** **(baʿathnā)** ***from our graves*** **(marqadinā)*****? This is what the Merciful promised, and the messengers spoke the truth."***

Baʿathnā means "to raise". A *marqad* is a place of rest; here, it means

"graves" (or "final resting places"). They are referring to God as "the Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*)" to implore divine mercy, even though, when they were alive, they used to quip, "What is this 'Merciful One'?" (25:60). Their words "*and the messengers spoke the truth*" are linked with a conjunction to "*this is what the Merciful promised*"; that is, a declarative sentence with an action verb is connected to a declarative sentence with a linking verb.

Their words—"*Woe be upon us! Who has raised us from our graves?*"—are founded on how they rejected the idea of the resurrection when they were alive. They sprouted from the roots of heedlessness and denial that they planted during their own lives. They drowned themselves in their own desires. Therefore, when they stand in their graves and are driven on towards the plains of resurrection, they are dumbfounded at entering a new world which is unwelcoming to them and offers them nothing but ruin. Terror—the like of which they had never experienced before—overtakes them. They are shocked. How is it that the mountains no longer stand? Thus, they cry out, "Woe be upon us! We are destroyed!" This was how they acted when they were alive, when calamity befell them. Then they ask who has raised them from their graves, for they are completely confounded.

Then, it hits them. The messengers had told them of the divine promise to resurrect them and recompense them. Thus, they bear witness that this is true and beg the Merciful for protection. They profess, "*This is what the Merciful promised*." This is how they acted when they were still alive: when their enemies got the upper hand, they used to flatter and cajole them and act humble, confessing to all sorts of wrongdoings and shortcomings. Then, they bear witness to the truthfulness of the messengers: *the messengers spoke the truth*.

From this, the following points can be deduced:

Why they cried "woe be upon us!" when they were raised from their graves.

Why they first asked who raised from their graves. At first, they seemed ignorant of it, but then they confessed to the reality of the Merciful and the truthfulness of the messengers and the messages they had borne from God. [Therefore, someone might ask why they said this; the answer is given in the interpretation above.]

The disbelievers are the ones saying, "*Who has raised us from our graves? This is what the Merciful promised, and the messengers spoke the truth.*"

Some exegetes hold that *"who has raised us from our graves?"* is linked via a conjunction to *"this is what the Merciful promised"*, with the grammatical particle *mā* intervening (*hādhā mā waʿada al-raḥmān*), and that the grammatical particle *mā* either introduces a verbal clause or is a relative pronoun (that is, it is either a *mā maṣdariyya* or *mā mawṣūla*). Therefore, in this view, either God, the angels, or the believers are responding to the disbelievers, who asked, "Who raised us from our graves?"

However, it is no secret that this—especially the interpretation of *mā* as introducing a verbal clause—grates against the apparent meaning of the verses. If *this is what the Merciful had promised* were a reply from God or the angels to the question of *who has raised us from our graves?*, the reply would have had to have answered the question of who did it, not what they did, because they asked who resurrected them.

Some exegetes address this objection by saying that this type of reply is a way of throwing their disbelief and rebelliousness back in their faces, and that the reply still indicates who raised them (that is, that it was the Merciful). However, this explanation does not work.

Lastly, it can also be deduced that *this is what the Merciful promised* is a subject-predicate sentence. Some exegetes object to this and maintain instead that *this* describes *graves* (marqadinā), rendering the meaning, "Who has raised us from these, our graves?" (This is because sometimes a demonstrative pronoun can come after the word it is describing.) Then, *mā* becomes the subject of a new sentence whose predicate is omitted, which would mean something along the lines of, "What the Merciful promised is true." However, this view is unlikely.

إِن كَانَتْ إِلاَّ صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ جَمِيعٌ لَّدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(36:53) ***It will have been but a single cry, and—behold!—all will be brought before Us.***

What "*it*" is left unmentioned. It means something along the lines of "this act will be but a single blast" or "this blast will be but a single blast which will take them by surprise, for they will be gathered before Us without any delay or respite."

The expression *before Us* (ladaynā) is used because, on that day, all will be present for judgment before God.

فَالْيَوْمَ لا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَلا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلاَّ مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

(36:54) ***So on this day, no soul shall be wronged at all, nor shall you*** **(2nd person singular)** ***be requited for anything but what you*** **(2nd person singular)** ***used to do.***

This means that, on that day, all will be judged justly, and none shall be misjudged in any way.

Nor shall you be requited for anything but what you used to do: This explains the preceding phrase (*on this day, no soul shall be wronged at all*) and—in actuality—shows why there shall be no injustice on that day. For, on that day, they will be recompensed for their deeds by their actual deeds. Injustice can be defined as "putting something in the wrong place". Therefore, burdening a person with his or her own deeds is by nature not unjust, since it involves putting something in the most suitable place.

The way that this verse describes how people will be summoned and addressed on the Day of Judgment (both the addressee[1] and people in general) should be taken somewhat metaphorically. Some people imagine that this verse means that mean that people will hear these exact words from God, angels, or the believers. However, nothing in this verse indicates that these words will literally be uttered.

The clause, *Nor shall you be requited for anything but what they used to* is addressed here to both the saved and condemned.

Some exegetes maintain that the word *illā* ("except", translated here as "anything but") implies that this verse cannot encompass all people. This is because God will actually multiply the reward of the believers. He will grant the believers more than their just recompense, as in: *They shall have what they wish, and with Us is more* (50:35). However, the verse itself is only speaking of actual recompense for deeds—deeds for deeds. Gifting a person with more than their just recompense is a different matter.

Possibly, this argument can also be responded to by saying that the meaning of the verse is that the righteous will not find their reward lessened in any way, nor will the wicked find their requital to be intensified, for wisdom would disallow this. However, there is no problem in increasing one's reward or reducing punishment; the intent of *nor shall they be requited for anything but what they used to do* is that they will only be requited for the sort of thing they used to do; if it is good, then it is good,

1 In that the latter half of the verse is phrased in the second person singular, that is, a single, unspecified "you". [Trans.]

and if it is evil, then it is evil.

However, a problem with this response is that if this were what the verse were meant to say, there would be no disagreement; however, the disagreement is over what the verse itself intends to say.

إِنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ الْيَوْمَ فِي شُغُلٍ فَاكِهُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(36:55) ***The dwellers of the Garden on that day will be busy with enjoyments*** **(fī shughulin fākihūn).**

Shughul is something that occupies a person and keeps his attention away from other things. *Fākih* is from *fakāha* and means "jesting and cheerful bantering", "enjoying", or "taking pleasure in". It has been said that it is not used as a trilateral verb.

Some say that *fākihūn* means "to possess fruit", like the word *lābin* (meaning "to possess milk") or *tāmir* (meaning "to possess dates"). However, it is unlikely that, here, it refers to actual fruit, since the verses mention fruit elsewhere, and so there would be no reason to repeat this.

It means that the dwellers of the garden, on that day, will be so busy enjoying the the blessings of the garden that they will not think of other things.

هُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُهُمْ فِي ظِلَالٍ عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ مُتَّكِؤُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(36:56) ***They and their spouses, in the shade*** **(ẓilāl)***, reclining on couches* **(arāʾik).**

Ẓilāl is the plural of *ẓill*, although some say it is the plural of *ẓullah*. It means "shade from the sun beneath a rooftop or portico or tree or something similar". An *arīka* (sing. of *arāʾik*) can refer to anything that is leant upon, such as cushions or other things.

It means, "The dwellers of paradise will be with their believing wives from this life or the heavenly maidens (*ḥūr al-ʿayn*), beneath the shade, shielded from the sun or other things, reclining on couches with honor and dignity."

لَهُمْ فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَلَهُم مَّا يَدَّعُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(36:57) ***Therein they shall have fruits*** **(fākiha)** ***and whatever else they seek.***

Fākiha is from the verb *yatafakah* ("to take amusement in", "to eat fruit") and means "fruit", such as apples or citrus fruit. *Yadʿūn* is from the root *d-ʿ-a* ("to call", "to ask for", "to pray") and means "to wish for". It means that, in the garden, they will have fruit and whatever else their hearts desire.

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سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِّن رَّبٍّ رَّحِيمٍ ﴿٥٨﴾

(36:58) ***"Peace!"—a word* (qawlan) *from a merciful Lord.***

"Peace" is the subject of a sentence whose predicate is elided. It is indefinite to make it sound larger than life and means something along the lines of "peace be upon them" or "they shall have peace". *Qawlan* ("word", "utterance") is the object of an elided verb, and means something along the lines of "I shall utter a word to him from a merciful Lord."

The most straightforward meaning is that they shall have peace [or a greeting of peace] from God, and that this is different from the peace wished upon them by the angels, mentioned in:

And the angels shall approach them from every gate. "Peace be upon you for what you endured! And what a blessed final abode." (13:34)

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وَامْتَازُوا الْيَوْمَ أَيُّهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(36:59) ***And stay apart today, O guilty ones!***

Meaning, "On that day, We shall tell the guilty to stay apart from the dwellers of Paradise and will distinguish between them." It is the actualization of what is referred to elsewhere, such as:

> *Or shall We make the faithful who work righteous deeds like the corrupt in the land, or shall we make the pious like the wicked?* (38:28)
> *Or do those who wrought evil think that We will make them like the faithful who worked righteous deeds, or that their life and their death shall be equal?* (45:21)

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أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَن لَّا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦٠﴾

(36:60) ***O children of Adam, did I not enjoin* (aʿhad) *you not to worship Satan? He is an open enemy to you.***

Aʿhad (from the root ʿ-*h*-*d*) means "advise" or "make a bequest". Here, "worshipping Satan" means "obeying what he whispers to a person or telling others to do what he says", for obedience is due to God alone, or to those whom God commands people to obey. The reason given for not obeying him is that he is an open enemy, for a person's enemy never approaches them with goodwill.

Some exegetes say that "worshipping Satan" here means worshipping deities other than God, and that they are referred to as "Satan" because he makes them seductive and glittery, but this view is rather contrived.

The words are addressed to the guilty in the name of "the children of Adam" because Satan first became an enemy of Adam when he was ordered to prostrate to Adam and refused haughtily. Therefore, he was cast out and became inimical to Adam's descendants and vowed:

> *He said: "Tell me, is this he whom You have honored above me? If You respite me to the day of resurrection, I will most certainly cause his progeny to perish, except for a few."* (17:62)

This divine warning not to obey Satan is also conveyed in the words of the messengers and prophets, as in:

> *O children of Adam! Do not let Satan bewitch you the way he caused your parents to leave the garden.* (7:27)
>
> *Do not let Satan ward you off; he is a clear enemy to you.* (43:62)

Some exegetes say that *aʿhad* refers to the covenant (*ʿahd*) that God made with human beings in the realm of pre-existence (*ʿālam al-dharr*), in which they were asked "*am I not your Lord?*" and swore "*yes*" (7:172).

As we discussed previously in the exposition of verse of *al-dharr* (7:172), the covenant taken there is in a way identical with the covenant directed at them in this world.

وَأَنِ اعْبُدُونِي هَٰذَا صِرَاطٌ مُّسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٦١﴾

(36:61) ***And to worship Me? This is the straight path.***

This explains the previous verse and is linked to it with a conjunction. The meaning of the "straight path" was discussed in the exegesis on Qur'an 1:6 (Sūrah al-Fātiḥa).

وَلَقَدْ أَضَلَّ مِنكُمْ جِبِلًّا كَثِيرًا أَفَلَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

(36:62) ***He has led astray a great multitude*** **(jibil)** ***of you. Could***

you not understand?

A *jibil* is a group. Some say that it is a large group. These words are a sort of gentle reproof.

هَٰذِهِ جَهَنَّمُ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(36:63) ***This is the hell which you were promised.***

Meaning, "You the prophets and messengers told you of this again and again. It is the first thing that God swore to Iblīs:

> '*You shall not have any authority over My servants, apart from the corrupt who follow you, and hellfire shall be their destination, for all of them*' (15:43)."

The wording of the verse implies that the hellfire will be roused on that day.

اصْلَوْهَا الْيَوْمَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(36:64) ***Today, burn in it*** **(iṣlawhā)** ***for what you used to reject.***

Al-ṣalā means "to accompany and follow" [and is therefore from the root *w-ṣ-l*]. Some exegetes say that it means "to endure heat" [and therefore is from the root *ṣ-l-y*]. It is clear that *for what you used to reject* is addressed to the disbelievers who are intended by *the guilty*.

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

(36:65) ***Today, We will seal their mouths, and their hands will speak, and their legs will bear witness to what they used to do.***

Meaning that these parts will all bear witness to what they were used for—such as if the hands or feet are employed to commit sins. Each limb will speak specifically about the sins under its domain.[1] *Hands* and *feet* are mentioned as examples. Similarly, ears, eyes, and hearts are mentioned elsewhere, such as in 17:36. Skin is also mentioned in 41:20, and this will be elaborated on in the exegesis of Sūrah 41, God willing.

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1 As an example, hands might steal, and feet might kick or walk somewhere disreputable. [Trans.]

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *they are waiting for nothing but a single cry* (36:49), it says:
This is at the end of time. A cry will echo forth while they are wrangling with each other in the marketplaces. They will fall dead on the spot, and none shall return to their homes or leave behind any bequest. This is what is meant by *then they will not be able to make any bequests or return to their people* (36:50).

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is narrated:
Two men will have spread out a cloth for buying and selling things on, but they will not [conclude their deal] and fold it up before the final hour strikes. A man will be raising a morsel of food to his mouth [but will not be able to eat it because] the final hour will intervene. A man will be filling his trough to water his livestock, but they will not sate their thirst because the final hour will intervene.[1]

Author's comments: Something to a similar effect has been narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from the Prophet via Abū Hurayra and also from Qatāda without a chain of narration.

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *And the trumpet shall be blown, and—behold!—they shall hasten from their graves (*ajdāth*) to their Lord* (36:51), it says:
Meaning, from the graves.[2]

(4) And in a narration from Abū Jārūd from Imām al-Bāqir, regarding *"Woe be upon us! Who has raised us from our graves?"* (36:52), it says:
A group of people will have been resting in their graves when they are raised for accounting; when they are awakened, they will think they had only been asleep. Then they will say, "*Woe be upon us! Who has raised us from our graves?*" The angels will reply, "*This is what the Merciful promised, and the messengers spoke the truth*" (36:52).

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1 That is, it will come about unexpectedly, when people are busy doing ordinary things. [Trans.]

2 That is, it is an explanation of the meaning of *ajdāth*, here already translated into English as "graves". [Trans.]

(5) In *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narration from Abū Baṣīr, it is related that Imām al-Ṣādiq said:
Abū Dharr—may God's mercy be upon him—used to say in his sermons: "What lies between death and the resurrection is naught but something akin to a sleep which someone is then woken from."

(6) Regarding *the dwellers of the Garden on that day will be busy with enjoyments (*fākihūn*)* (36:55), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says:
[It means] they will be enjoying the company of women and dallying with them.

(7) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *in the shade, reclining on couches* (arāʾik) (36:55), Abū Jārūd relates from Imām al-Bāqir:
Arāʾik are couches [akin to bridal couches] with curtained canopies.

(8) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *"Peace!"—a word from a merciful Lord* (36:58), it says:
Peace here means "safety".

(9) Regarding *And stay apart today, O guilty ones!* (36:59), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says:
When God gathers people on the day of resurrection, they will remain standing upon their feet, sweat pouring down, until they cry out, "O Lord! Take us to account, even if towards the Fire!" So God will raise a wind that will strike them, and a caller will call out, "*And stay apart today, o guilty ones!*" so that they may be distinguished from one another. So the guilty will go to the fire, and those in whose hearts is faith will go to the garden.

Author's comments: It is related in some narrations that God—glorified be He—will manifest himself to them. As long as He is manifesting Himself, they will be so dazzled by Him that they will forget everything else. Here, "manifesting" means that all the veils between them and their Lord will be lifted so that they will perceive Him in all ways other than physical sight, for it is impossible to physically see God.

(10) In *al-Iʿtiqādāt* by al-Ṣādūq, it is related that Imām al-Bāqir said:
Whoever hearkens to a speaker has worshipped him. If the speaker is speaking on behalf of God, then that person has worshipped God. If the speaker is speaking on behalf of Iblīs, then that person has worshipped Iblīs.

(11) In *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narration from Muḥammad ibn Sālim,

it is related that Imām al-Bāqir said:

The limbs of a believer will not bear witness over them; instead, they will bear witness over those who have merited certain doom. The believer will be given his book in his right hand. God, the Exalted and Mighty, says: *As for those who are given their book sin their right hands, they shall read their books…and not be wronged in the least* (17:71).

(12) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is related from Masʿada ibn Ṣadaqa from Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad [Imām al-Ṣādiq] from his grandfather [Imam al-Sajjād] that the Commander of the Faithful [Imām ʿAlī] said in a sermon describing the terror of the day of resurrection: God will have sealed their mouths, and so they shall not speak. Instead, their hands shall speak, and their legs shall bear witness, and their skin shall speak of what they did. They shall hide nothing from God.

Author's comments: There are other narrations to this effect. Some will be mentioned at the end of the exegesis of *Their hearing and eyes and skin shall bear witness to them* (41:20), and some were mentioned in the discussion on *[Their] ears, eyes, and hearts will all be questioned* (17:36).

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Verses 66–83

This wraps up the previous themes by reframing them in a different context. It warns of divine punishment and affirms that the Messenger was divinely sent. His book is a [divinely sent form of] remembrance and a recitation (*qurʾān*), not just poetry or a book of poetry. It attests to the creation of livestock as a sign of divine unity (*tawḥīd*) and argues for the reality of the resurrection.

وَلَوْ نَشَاء لَطَمَسْنَا عَلَى أَعْيُنِهِمْ فَاسْتَبَقُوا الصِّرَاطَ فَأَنَّى يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(36:66) ***And if We had willed, We could have put out*** **(la-ṭamasnā)** ***their eyes, and then they would have scrambled about, looking for the way, but how would they see?***

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

> [The verb] *ṭamasa* means to eradicate something such that no trace of it is left. "Putting out their eyes" here is similar in meaning to effacing a book, spending money, or destroying an object, such that it can never be regained. A blind person is called *maṭmūs* or *ṭamīs* when their eyelids have been sealed shut.

And if We had willed, We could have put out their eyes means that "if We had wanted to, We could have wiped out their eyes leaving no trace, and they would neither see nor have sight."

And then they would have scrambled about, looking for the way: Meaning, the path is clear and easy to find; it does not lead its wayfarer astray. However, they would not be able to see it, now or ever; *but how will they see?* implies that they would never be able to see it. Therefore, they will rush about, to and fro.

Some exegetes hold that *istabaqū* (here, rendered "they would have scrambled about") means that they will have set out towards the path of truth but will not have been guided towards it. However, this interpretation is unlikely.

وَلَوْ نَشَاء لَمَسَخْنَاهُمْ عَلَى مَكَانَتِهِمْ فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا مُضِيًّا وَلا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(36:67) ***And if We had willed, We could have transfigured them***

(la-masakhnā-hum) ***in their places*** **(makānatihim),** ***and they would not have been able to go or come back.***

Majmaᶜ al-Bayān says:

> *Maskh* means to disfigure something, such as when a group of people were turned into monkeys or pigs. *Makānah* [in *makānatihim*] means the same thing as *makān* ("place").

"Transfiguring them in their places" means to metamorphosize them right where they are sitting, without even making them get up. It would be done solely by an act of divine will without making any effort or seeking any means, which alludes to the fact that it is easy and undemanding on God.

And they would not have been able to go (muḍiyᵃⁿ) *or come back:* Meaning, they would not be able to move about in the torment or go back to their previous lives. Here, "going" and "coming" are figures of speech contrasting "being safe" versus "being transfigured and tormented".

Some exegetes maintain that *go* (muḍiyᵃⁿ) means "to go to their destinations" and *come back* means "to return to their homes and families", but this is unlikely.

وَمَنْ نُعَمِّرْهُ نُنَكِّسْهُ فِي الْخَلْقِ أَفَلَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(36:68) ***And whenever We extend someone's life*** **(nuᶜammirhu),** ***we reverse*** **(nunakkishu)** ***his constitution. Will they not understand?***

Nuᶜammirhu means to lengthen someone's life. *Nunakkishu* means to turn something upside down; here, it refers to turning strength into weakness, and abundance into deficiency. In old age, a human being's strength reverts to weakness, intellect reverts to ignorance, and memory reverts to forgetfulness.

This verse—and possibly the two previous verses also—bears witness to how God reverts his human creation to an earlier phase of life once the human being reaches old age. He who can do this also has the ability to wipe out their eyes or transfigure them on the spot.

Will they not understand? This rebukes them for their brainlessness and prods them to think about these matters.

وَمَا عَلَّمْنَاهُ الشِّعْرَ وَمَا يَنبَغِي لَهُ إِنْ هُوَ إِلاَّ ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْآنٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦٩﴾

(36:69) ***And We have not taught him poetry, nor would this be***

suitable for him; it is but a reminder and a clear recitation.

This alludes back to what was said at the outset of the chapter, and affirms the veracity of the Prophet's message and that his book was divinely sent from the environs of God.

Nor would this be suitable for him: The Prophet is most obliged, for no one can say he is just a poet or is just versifying. This sentence dispels any possible doubt that the Prophet is somehow deficient or incapable [of versifying] because God has not instructed him in poetry. Rather, God has elevated him above the level of a common bard who weaves beautiful webs of illusion and fantasy whenever the fit strikes him into musical meters that delight the ear. It would not behove the Prophet to be called but a poet when he is a messenger from God, and the sign of his messenger and the content of his call is the Qur'an—miraculous in its expression, a divine reminder, and a clear recitation.

... it is but a reminder and a clear recitation: This elaborates on *We have not taught him poetry, nor would this be suitable for him*. It means that the Qur'an is not poetry in any way, shape, or form; rather, it is a remembrance and a clear recitation. The word *illā* ("but") addresses an audience believing the opposite [that is, that the Qur'an is not divine revelation] and emphasizes that, contrary to their view, it is nothing but a reminder and a clear recitation.[1]

By describing the Qur'an as a *reminder* (*dhikr*) and *recitation* (*qurʾān*), the verse asserts that the Qur'an is a reminder recited from the divine precincts.

لِيُنذِرَ مَن كَانَ حَيًّا وَيَحِقَّ الْقَوْلُ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(36:70) ***To warn those who would have life, and that the word may be proved true against those who deny it.***

There are a couple possible meanings of this verse. One possibility is that this provides a reason for *and We have not taught him poetry*, thereby meaning, "We did not teach him poetry so that he might be absolved of the accusation that he is just a poet, thereby enabling him to warn whoever would truly live through the Qur'an." Another possibility is that it provides a reason for *it is but a reminder*, thereby rendering the meaning,

1 Grammatically referred to as *qaṣr al-qalb*. [Trans.]

"What he recites to the people is naught but a reminder and a clear recitation which We have sent to him to warn whoever might truly live." Or, both views can be fused.

As you see, the verse indicates that the goal of sending the messenger and the Qur'an is to warn whoever would truly be alive, and to establish the truth in the face of those who reject it. "Being alive" is a figure of speech for applying the intellect to truth and hearing the truth. Reading this verse alongside those at the beginning of this chapter shows that this is the clearest meaning.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا خَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِمَّا عَمِلَتْ أَيْدِينَا أَنْعَامًا فَهُمْ لَهَا مَالِكُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

(36:71) ***Do they not see that We created livestock for them—by Our own hands—and given them control over them?***

This verse depicts one of the signs of divine oneness which illustrates God's lordship and management over the human world. It is similar to those which came before regarding signs of divine oneness, such as the springing to life of the dead earth, the flowering of grains and fruits, and the gushing forth of springs.

Livestock are mentioned as something which the divine hand has wrought so that people will profess that God has fashioned things instead of assigning partners to God in His acts of creation. "Hand" is metaphorical and means that the creation of things is exclusive to Him.

And given them control over them **(fa-hum lahā mālikūn)***:* Following on from the previous phrase (*We created livestock for them*), this phrase means: We have created livestock for the sake of human beings, and this means exclusivity which indicates ownership. After all the conventional ownership in the society is an outcome of exclusivity [of use].

Some exegetes find it difficult to see that *given them control over them* branches off as a natural consequence of *We have created for them*. Therefore, because they reject this, they have to maintain that there is something elided which is *We have created* it *for them*. However, the problem with this view is evident; it is clear that the sentences flow naturally, one from another, as a consequence, and that there is no need to postulate something elided.

Some exegetes also hold that *milk* (ownership, control) here means "holding power over" and "subjugating". However, the problem with this view is that it requires the next verse (*and We have subjected them to them*)

to be construed as merely emphasizing this one, whereas it is better if the next verse introduces something new rather than repeating what the previous verse said.

وَذَلَّلْنَاهَا لَهُمْ فَمِنْهَا رَكُوبُهُمْ وَمِنْهَا يَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(36:72) ***And We have subjected them to them, so some of them, they ride; and others, they eat.***

*Subjecting (*dhalalnāhum*)* here means that livestock were made docile and acquiescent to human beings so that human beings can control them. *Ride (*rakūb*)* refers to loading up beasts of burden, such as camels or cows. *Others, they eat* means eating their meat.

وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ وَمَشَارِبُ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

(36:73) ***And they find other advantages and milk in them—will they not be grateful?***

Advantages here refers to whatever they can make use of, such as the animals' wool, hair, or hides. *Milk* (*mashārib*, lit. "drinks") is the plural of *mashrab* ("drink"). *Mashrab* is a verbal noun beginning with *m-* (*maṣdar mīmī*) denoting the object of its associated verb [*sh-r-b*, meaning "to drink"; therefore, *mashrab*, meaning, "what is drunk"]. By it is meant "milk". *Grateful* here used in a similar manner to how it was used previously in *So that they may eat of its fruits. And their hands did not make it. Will they then not give thanks?* (36:35).

Altogether, the three verses mean: "Do they not know that We created livestock—such as camels and cows—for their sake and as part of the way in which We manage the matter of their worldly life? Therefore, they exert control over them whereby they can make us of them without opposition. We have subjected them to them so that they may decide how to use their livestock, and their livestock accept this without rebelling. They carry loads on some and eat the meat of others. They glean other benefits from their livestock as well—for instance, their wool, hair, hides and milk. So will they not be grateful to God for how He has perfectly managed things—a divine plan which reveals His lordship? Will they not worship him out of gratitude for his blessings?"

وَاتَّخَذُوا مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ آلِهَةً لَعَلَّهُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

(36:74) ***And they have taken gods other than Allah, seeking help from them.***

They refers to the polytheists. By *gods* here is meant idols, lesser demons (*shayāṭīn*), or Pharaoh-like men who deify themselves, but not the angels near to God or human saints, because they do not meet the criteria mentioned at the end of the next verse: *And they will be a host brought before them* (36:75).

They have taken them as gods hoping for their aid, for the masses held that their gods were delegated by God to manage the universe, in matters both benevolent and maleficent, and so they worshipped them to placate them so they would not get angry and cease blessing them or strike them down with their wrath.

لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُمْ جُندٌ مُّحْضَرُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

(36:75) ***They shall not be able to assist them, and they will be a host brought before them.***

Meaning, those whom the polytheists have taken as gods cannot assist them because they do not control anything, either for good or for ill.

They will be a host brought before them: The most ready interpretation is that the first pronoun *they* refers to the polytheists, and the second pronoun *them* refers to the deities other than God. The intent behind it is to say that the polytheists are their gods' fighting forces, and soldiery necessitates obedience. Thus, the polytheists are the ones who are considered to be obedient to their gods, not the reverse. [That is, one cannot say that their gods are obedient to them.]

*Brought before them (*muḥḍarūn*)* refers to bringing them to account on the day of resurrection, as in the following verses:

> *And they have feigned a blood relationship between Him and the jinn, but the jinn know they will be brought forward* [for accounting, muḥḍarūn]. (37:158)
>
> *And were it not from the blessing of my Lord, you would have been brought forward* [for accounting, muḥḍarūn] (37:57).

The upshot of the verse is that the demigods whom the polytheists have turned to for help are impotent, and the polytheists are obedient followers of their demigods and will be brought forward with them on the day of resurrection.

What if someone were to argue that the verse means that the polytheists are the footsoldiers of their demigods, ready to slay on their behalf in this world? Or what if they were to argue that it means that the demigods are a ready fighting force to punish the polytheists on the day of resurrection? For they will be tossed into the Fire which will burn the polytheists. Or what if they were to argue that they will be brought forward to [witness] their punishment to show that they are unable to assist them, or to show that the polytheists will despair of their gods' intercession?

These views may all be dispensed with.

فَلَا يَحْزُنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّا نَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

(36:76) ***So do not let their speech sadden you; We know what they hide and what they disclose.***

The *fa-* at the beginning of the sentence (rendered as *so*) shows that the negation which begins the verse (*do not let their speech sadden you*) follows naturally from what was discussed previously about the polytheists taking deities other than God hoping for their aid. It means that "even if this is truly happening, those whom they are seeking aid from will not ever be able to help them; instead, they will be brought forward for punishment. So do not be sad over their idolatrous words. We are not heedless of this or crippled by it, nor does anything escape Our notice. Instead, We know what sentiments they hide inside themselves and what they speak openly."

With respect to the composition of the verse, there are some unsubstantiated views which we have elected not to mention.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الْإِنسَانُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٧٧﴾

(36:77) ***Does not man see that We created him from a droplet, and then he becomes an open adversary.***

This hearkens back to what was discussed with respect to the resurrection and arguments for its reality in the wake of their denial. It is not farfetched to say that it is an elaboration on their words, alluded to [but left unspecified] in *do not let their speech sadden you* (36:76). "Seeing" is used here to mean "certain knowledge"; that is, it is saying, does man not know with full certainty that We created him from a droplet? *Droplet* is in the indefinite to show what a mean, base thing it is. *Adversary* (khaṣīm) is a verbal noun from the root *kh-ṣ-m* ("to be an enemy") and refers to

being quarrelsome or adversarial.

It is phrased as a question to show wonder at such a thought, meaning, "How strange it is that the human being knows he was created from this despicable droplet, and yet he unexpectedly becomes a quarrelsome, open enemy towards his Creator."

وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ قَالَ مَنْ يُحْيِي الْعِظَامَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ ﴿٧٨﴾

(36:78) ***He has made a likeness for Us and forgotten [how he was] created. He said, "Who will resurrect these bones when they have rotted*** **(ramīm)*****?"***

Ramīm means "decomposed". *Forgets [how he was] created* (nasiya khaqahu) is a clause (*ḥāl*) describing the subject of *makes* (ḍaraba). *"Who will resurrect these bones when they have rotted?"* explains the analogy that people are using; therefore, it is mentioned separately without a connecting conjunction. It is as if the verse is saying, "What kind of analogy (or likeness) are people putting forward? Say, 'Who will revive these bones after they have rotted?'"

It means, "The human being has concocted these analogies for Us and has forgotten that he was first created from but a droplet. He argues '*who will resurrect these bones when they have rotted?*" If he thought about this, he would not make these analogies, and instead he would refute his own argument by looking at how he was first created—which is the argument this verse puts forward. Therefore, God dictated this answer to the Prophet.

قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا الَّذِي أَنشَأَهَا أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٩﴾

(36:79) ***Say: "The one who will give life to them is the one who first brought them into existence*** **(anshaʾaha)*****, and He knows all the creations."***

Here, the response is dictated to the Prophet. The verb *anshaʾa* means "to first bring into existence" and is qualified by *awwala marra* (lit. "for the first time", here rendered *first*). *He knows all the creations* points to the fact that God neither forgets nor is unaware of anything related to His creation. He is the one who first created these bones and is not unaware of anything that will have happened to them before or after the person's death. Therefore, He can revive them, and is unhindered by unawareness or forgetfulness.

الَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ الشَّجَرِ الأَخْضَرِ نَارًا فَإِذَا أَنتُم مِّنْهُ تُوقِدُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

(36:80) ***He is the one who placed fire in the green tree, from which you kindle it*** **(tūqidūn).**

This further explains *the one who first brought them into existence. Tūqidūn* (from the verbal noun *īqād*) means "to light a fire".

This verse aims to dispel the notion that it is impossible to bring life back to something lifeless. Life and death are two opposites. The response is that this is not possible because God has made green trees, which drip dewdrops, a source of fire which people light. Exegetes say that *tree* (shajar) refers to two specific types of dry, bushy, desert shade-trees called *shajara al-markh* and *shajara al-ʿafār*.[1] Their wood is collected while still green. Then, the branch from the *markh* tree is struck atop the branch of the ʿ*afār* tree, and fire is kindled, by the permission of God. Restoring life to the dead is no more wondrous than kindling fire from a green tree, for both examples involve opposites.

أَوَلَيْسَ الَّذِى خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَى أَنْ يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُم بَلَى وَهُوَ الْخَلاَّقُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٨١﴾

(36:81) ***Is not the one who created the heavens and the earth able to create something similar? Of course—He is the creator, the knower.***

This is a rhetorical question. The verse puts forward the ramifications of the previous argument about taking fire from green trees and does so by presenting an argument that is easier for the human mind to grasp. That is, instead of mentioning their first creation, it puts forward the creation of the heavens and the earth, which is something much more magnificent than the creation of humankind. As this verse says:

> *The creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the human.* (40:57)

The verse means, "How can someone say that God created the celestial

1 *Shajara al-markh:* Leptadenia pyrotechnica, a brushy, short desert tree found from Senegal to India. *Shajara al-ʿafār*: A many-branched shade tree found in Ethiopia, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, which can grow quite large. The name can be used for several species of tree including Tarchonanthus camphoratus. [Trans.]

and earthly realms—with all the many things in them and their wondrous, organized workings, creations beyond number whose intricate, amazing schemes that boggle the mind!—and then say that the same creator cannot revive the human being, while the human existence is but a tiny fragment of this enormous universe? Nay, He is the creator, the omniscient."

Something similar (bi-mithlihim) means "creating their like". According to lexicographers, *mithil* has a subtly different meaning than the related word *mathal*.

The view has been put forward that *bi-mithlihim* actually just means "themselves". It is similar to how someone might politely say "someone like you does not need that" to mean "you do not need that". This might be the case, were *bi-mithlihim* to be taken figuratively; however, nothing in the verse suggests that. Furthermore, it would then be necessary to read the previous verse as "is not the one who created the heavens and earth able create them?". This does not work because the discussion here is about resurrection, not creation, and the polytheists already believed that God had created the universe.

Some exegetes say that the pronoun *them* in *bi-mithlihim* (lit. "similar to them") refers to the heavens and the earth, for the phrase "the heavens and the earth" encompasses everything in it, including sentient beings. For that reason, a pronoun used for sentient beings ("them") is used. The intent would be to show that since God was create the heavens and the earth once, He could create them again.

However, the problem here is that the verse is about resurrecting human beings, not resurrecting the entirety of the heavens and the earth. Additionally, creating is not the same thing as resurrecting, and the verse speaks of "creating the like of them".

The truth is: "Creating the likeness of them (*bi-mithlihim*)" means returning them to life for recompense after death, as can be gleaned from what al-Ṭabrisī—may God have mercy upon his soul—says in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*. He explains that the human being is composed of soul and body; in this world, the body is subject to continual change and decay. It and its parts do not stop changing. Once part of a compound being ends its lifespan, the entire compound being comes to rest. The personality of a human is preserved in his soul which is an independent, immaterial entity, unaffected by the vagaries of material existence, such as death or decay.

Therefore, it can be deduced from the verse that the soul does not die when the body dies. Instead, it is preserved, so that it can go back to God,

as was mentioned with respect to this verse:

> *And they say, "What? After we have disappeared into the earth, will we then be reborn?" Nay, they deny their meeting with their Lord. Say, "The Angel of Death, who has been tasked with you, will take your souls, and then to your Lord you will return."* (32:10–11)

In the afterlife, a person's body will come across as a likeness of his former body, not as the same, exact body he had in this world. However, the human coming in that body in the afterlife is identical with the human in the previous body. This is because the identity of a person is determined by the soul which is the same [in both planes].

In saying "*who will revive these bones when they have rotted?*", the polytheists are casting doubt on the idea of creating new bodies, not new souls. Therefore, God replies by affirming the possibility of creating the like of their former bodies. However, this does not mean that they will not return to the exact same bodies. Their souls will be preserved in the divine realm and then reaffixed to their recreated bodies, such that they will be the exact same people they were when alive. As God says:

> *Do they not see that Allah, who created the heavens and earth and did not fail in their creation, is able to give life to the dead?* (46:33)

Thus, the dead will be revived exactly as they were in this life, for verse 46:33 says *able to revive the dead*, not "able to bring to life something similar to the dead".

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٨٢﴾

(36:82) ***Whenever He wills something, he says to it "Be!" and it is.***

This verse is one of the gems of the Qur'an. It tells of the creational word and clarifies that God does not need anything else when bringing anything He wills into being. No one and nothing but His exalted essence is necessary to bring something into being or to prevent something from existing.

The wording in this verse differs slightly from the word in similar verses:

> *Our word is such that when We will something, we but say to it "be!".* (16:40)
>
> *When He has decreed something, He but says to it "be" and it is.* (2:117)

Whenever* (innamā amruhu idhā)[1] *He wills something…: *Amr* means "matter". Verse 16:40 speaks of God's word, rather than his "matter"; this could be taken to suggest that "matter" means "word". Although this supports the view that the *amr* means *qawl* which is the creational word "be!", however, after reflecting on the verses, it becomes clear that the intent behind this verse is to show how easy it is for God to create something, not to explain what word He uses to create with. Therefore, the correct interpretation is to take "word" to mean "matter" not to take "matter" to mean "word" and interpret it as command.

Whenever He wills something (idhā arāda shayʾan) means "whenever He wills to bring something into being'; this is what the context of the verses indicates. In some places, the verb *decree* (*qaḍā*, as opposed to *arāda*) is used to express the divine will:

> *If He decrees a matter, he but says to it "be" and it is.* (2:117, 19:35, and 40:68)

There is no harm in taking the word *qaḍā* to mean "divine decree", because both *qaḍā* and *ḥukm* mean "decree" and hence may speak of the divine will to bring a thing into being. However, it should be noted that the creational will occurs when the object has no way except to come into being by God. So, the meaning of *when We will it* means when we place it under Our will.

He says to it "be": This is the predicate of the sentence beginning with *innamā amruhu* (lit. "his will is such that if He wills something, He says to it 'be' and it is"). It means, He utters to it the word "be". Clearly, this is not a physical utterance; otherwise, that would require another creational word [to create the apparatus necessary to speak the first word], and this would lead to endless regression. Also, the being which is about to created does not have hears or a hearing apparatus whereby it might hear the creational word "be!"; otherwise, if it had ears, it would already exist and would not be in need of the creational word "be!". This verse is metaphorical, not literal, and means that the creation of things springs immediately from God's essence, with no need for anyone or anything to intervene and no delay.

Some exegetes hold that the word "be!" is actually a spoken word; in fact, a great many of the early commentators inclined towards that view. However, from the above, it should be clear that this view is untenable. Furthermore, the argument has been made that since the inner workings of

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1 Lit. "indeed His matter is that if." [Trans.]

God are beyond the human mind, debates like this should be abandoned.

True, God is beyond the human intellect. However, if we are to discard all solid intellectual argumentation simply because the intellect cannot encompass God, then we may as well discard all religious knowledge. For instance, asserting the unblemished nature of the divine book is done via intellectual proof. Without the backing of intellectual proof, neither the Qur'an nor the Sunnah nor anything else could be used to prove anything. Therefore, that argument is facetious.

Doubtlessly, during the act of creation, there is nothing but God and the object being created; there is no third party. It is only after the object is created that divine will (as something identifiably different from the divine or the divine essence) can be treated as the cause. While the divine will is one of the attributes of act, it is above being an actual action. Otherwise, things would not be in need of God for their existence, and this is clearly incorrect.

Furthermore, there is nothing other than God called "existence" or "bringing into existence" by which the thing becomes "existent". Bringing something into being is a matter between the thing and God without any intermediary.

Therefore, from this, it follows that the creational world "be!" is in fact the existence of a created thing. However, from that perspective which is linked to God and dependent on Him. Still, insofar as it is a discrete thing, it can be called a "being (*mawjūd*)" as opposed to "something currently being brought into being (*ījād*)", and a "created thing (*makhlūq*)" instead of a "thing being created (*khalq*)."

From this, it can also be deduced that what is bestowed by Him is not described by pause or lapse and would not undergo change and variation. Nor does bringing something into being require stages. And if these things appear in the creation, they rest upon things that were brought into being not from how they are connected to their Lord. This is a door [of knowledge] that opens one thousand other doors.

These truths are hinted at in these verses:

> *Like Adam, He created him from dust then said to him "be!" and he was*. (3:59)
>
> *And our command is but a single command, like the blink of an eye*. (54:10)
>
> *And the command of Allah is a decree decreed*. (33:38)

Other verses could also be cited.

And it is: This shows how things immediately obey the divine command by cladding themselves with being.

فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(36:83) ***So glory be to the one in whose hands is dominion* (malakūt)** ***over all things, and to whom you shall return.***

Malakūt here is an exaggerated or intensified form of the word *mulk* (ownership, dominion), similar to the words *raḥmūt* and *rahbūt*, which are intensified forms of the word "mercy" and "terror", respectively.

Considering this verse with the previous verse gives the sense that the divine dominion (*malakūt*) is associated with that aspect of things which are facing God whereas divine kingdom (*mulk*) is associated with that aspect which is facing the creation, or both aspects together, as adduced from the following verses:

> *Thus We showed Abraham the dominion* (malakūt) *of the heavens and the earth, so that he could be among those who were certain* (6:75).
>
> *Do they not look to the dominion* (malakūt) *of the heavens and the earth?* (7:185)
>
> *Say: In whose hand is the dominion (*malakūt*) over all things?* (23:88)

He made the dominion (*malakūt*) with his hands to show that He has authority over it, and no one else has any share in it.

The slant of this verse—*so glory be to the one in whose hands is dominion over all things*—is that the polytheists doubted the possibility of the resurrection because they were heedless of the divine kingdom and divine authority over all things. However, God is above such objections.

And to whom you shall return: This is addressed to all people, believers or otherwise. Now that God has been absolved of such aspersions, it concludes the discussion.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related regarding *And We have not taught him poetry, nor would this be suitable for him; it is but a reminder and a clear recitation* (36:69):

The Quraysh used to say, "Muḥammad is just speaking poetry." So God refuted them with *And We have not taught him poetry,*

nor would this be suitable for him; it is but a reminder and a clear recitation (36:69). The Prophet never spoke in poetic verse.

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is related from al-Ḥasan:
There was a commonly known line of poetry that said "grey hair and Islam suffice as deterrents for a man". The Messenger of God used to repeat it as a proverb [but swap the two nouns], saying: "Islam and grey hair suffice as deterrents for a man".
One day, Abū Bakr said, "O Messenger of God! It is, 'Grey hair and Islam suffice as deterrents for a man.' I bear witness that you are the messenger of God and that God did not teach you poetry, and it would not be suitable for you."

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is related that ʿĀʾishah said:
The Messenger of God used to cite an aphorism which my brother Banī Qays had put into verse: "The days will show you what you used to be unaware of. And news will come to you from whence it had not before." However, he began to recite it the other way, as "And there will come to you from whence it had not, the news."
When he did that, Abū Bakr would tell him, "It is not like this, O Messenger of God."
The Prophet would reply, "I am not a poet, and it would not be suitable for me."

Author's comments: These two narrations and similar ones are related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from al-Ḥasan and ʿĀʾishah. *al-Durr al-Manthūr* also contains other narrations with aphorisms that the Prophet cited.

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is related that the Prophet said in a sort of semi-rhyming way, "I am a prophet, no lie. I am the son of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib." Some people have maintained that this was not actually a poem; others have said that the words are harmonious but that the Prophet was not actually trying to compose poetry.

After investigating this account, many people have discarded this narration. It is easier to discard it than to argue that this wasn't really poetry or that the Prophet wasn't intentionally versifying.

(4) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it says regarding *To warn those who would have life, and that the word may be proved true against those who deny it* (36:70):
Those who would have life may mean "those who would have a working intellect (*ʿāqil*)". This is narrated from ʿAlī.

(5) In *Ṭafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *And they have taken gods other*

than Allah, seeking help from them. They shall not be able to assist them, and they will be a host brought before them (36:74–75), Abū al-Jārūd relates from Imām al-Bāqir:

Their gods cannot help them, and they are as a readied army for their gods.

(6) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is related from al-Ḥalabī that Imām al-Ṣādiq said:

Ubayy ibn Khalaf came and took an old bone from a wall and crumbled it, then said, "When we are bones and corpses, we will be raised again as a creation?"

So God revealed: *He said, "Who will resurrect these bones when they have rotted?" Say: "The one who will give life to them is the one who first brought them into existence, and He knows all the creations."* (36:78–79)

Author's comments: Something similar is related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* via numerous chains of narration from Ibn ʿAbbās, ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr, Qatādah, al-Saddī, and ʿIkrimah. It is also narrated from Ibn ʿAbbas that the person speaking was al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wāʾil; another version says that the speaker was ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy.

(7) In *al-Iḥtijāj*, the following discussion with Imām al-Ṣādiq is related:

Someone asked, "Will the soul disappear after it leaves its container [that is, the body], or continue to live on?"

Imām al-Ṣādiq replied, "It will continue to live until the first trumpet is blown. At that time, all things will cease to exist. There will be nothing to sense and nothing to be sensed. Then things will be brought back just as their creator first created them. This will be done over a period of 400 years, between the two blows of the trumpet, during which time all of creation will be hibernating."

The questioner asked, "How will things be resurrected, when bodies have decomposed and limbs scattered apart—one in one land, eaten by beasts of prey; another in another land, chewed apart by insects; and a third which has crumbled to dust and is scooped up with clay to build a wall?"

Imām al-Ṣādiq said, "The One who first fashioned them from nothing and formed them without any prior pattern is able to bring them back just as He brought the first into being."

The questioner said, "Explain more."

Imām al-Ṣādiq said, "Each soul will remain in its place. The good souls will be in light and an expansive space, and the evil souls will be in a constricted space and in darkness. Bodies will become dust, just as they were once created from dust, and whatever the animals eat or the insects chew—all of it will be preserved in the dust before One whose attention does not slip from a single grain in the darkness of the earth, the One who knows the number and weight of all things. The dust of animate beings will be in a house of gold in the dust. And when it is time for the resurrection, a resurrecting rain will rain down upon the earth. The earth will become muddy and will churn about until men are sifted from the dust. It will be as gold is separated from dirt when the dirt is washed with water, or when butter is churned from milk. The particles of dust will reunite with the various forms, by the power of God. Then the souls will be returned to their forms, which will look exactly like the originals. When the souls climb back in, nothing will seem different to them.

(8) In *Nahj al-Balagha*, it says [that Imam ʿAlī said]:
When He has willed a thing, He says to it "be" and it is, but not with a voice that is heard. Rather, His word is an act which originates from Him. Nothing like it [what was created] will have existed before; if it had, it would have been a second god.

(9) In *Nahj al-Balagha*, it says [that Imam ʿAlī said]:
He speaks, but not with a voice; and He wills, but not with a mind.

(10) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related via a chain of narration from Ṣafwān ibn Yaḥyā that Ṣafwān ibn Yaḥyā said:
I said to Abū al-Ḥasan [Imām al-Riḍā], "Tell me about the will (*irāda*)—does it come from God or is it a created being?"
He said: "When human beings will something, they do so in their minds; then, their will is expressed via their acts. However, God's will is His creational act, for He does not talk, mull over things, or ruminate. For He is above doing such things; these are things that created beings do. God's will is nothing but His act. That is what is meant by the verse "*be*" *and it is*. He does not speak with words or a tongue, nor does he consider or ponder. And there is no quality for that as there is no quality for Him.

Author's comments: There are many narrations from the Imams identifying the divine will as an attribute of act (*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*).

Chapter 37

Sūrah al–Ṣaffāt

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Verses 1–11

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This chapter contains a theological argument for the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). It warns those who associate partners with God and gives glad tidings to the purified, sincere believers (*mukhlaṣīn*). It also elaborates on the fate of each group. Then, it recalls some of God's believing servants whom God blessed and aided against their enemies. The end of the chapter ties things together by concluding that God is free from imperfection, sending peace upon the divine messengers, and praising God for His acts. The [style and content of the] text indicates that the chapter is Meccan.

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وَالصَّٰٓفَّٰتِ صَفّٗا ١ فَالزَّٰجِرَٰتِ زَجۡرٗا ٢ فَالتَّٰلِيَٰتِ ذِكۡرًا ٣

(37:1–3) ***By those who array themselves in ranks*** **(wa al-ṣāffāt-i ṣaffan),** ***and those who threaten away*** **(wal-zājirāt-i zajran),** ***and those who recite a reminder*** **(fal-tāliyāt-i dhikran).**

Ṣāffāt ("rows of rows", "ranks") is said to be the plural of *ṣāffāh* ("rows", "lines", "queues"), which itself is the plural of *ṣāf* ("line", "row", "queue"). It speaks of a group whose members arrange themselves into rows and ranks. *Zājirāt* comes from the root *z-j-r* and means "to ward something off through instilling fear of censure or consequences". *Tāliyāt* comes from the root *t-l-w* and means "reciting" or "reading aloud".

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God has sworn an oath by these three things—the *ṣāffāt*, the *zājirāt*, and the *tāliyāt*. However, exegetes disagree over what God means by this. Here are some of their views on the meaning of *ṣāffāt*:

(1) They are the angels, who line themselves up in the heavens, just like the faithful on earth line themselves up in rows for prayer.
(2) They are the angels; the word describes their wings stilling in

the air when they wish to descend to earth and are awaiting the command of God.

(3) They are a group of the faithful, standing in prayer or lining up for battle.

Regarding *zājirāt*, they say:

(1) They are the angels, warning the believers away from sins. God conveys these warnings to people's hearts through impressions and thoughts, in the same way that Satan casts whispers into the hearts of men.

(2) They are the angels responsible for the clouds. They keep them in check and drive them forth to the places that God wills.

(3) They are the *zawājir* of the Qur'an—namely, the verses which prohibit ugly deeds.

(4) They are the faithful, raising their voices in reciting the Qur'an, urging people to abstain from what is forbidden.

Regarding *tāliyāt*, they say:

(1) These are the angels, reciting the revelation to a prophet who is receiving revelation.

(2) These are the angels, reciting the book of God's decree; in it is mention of what is to come.

(3) It is a group of the reciters of the Qur'an, reciting it during the ritual prayer.

Possibly—and God knows best—these three groups (the *ṣāffāt, zājirāt,* and *tāliyāt*) are groups of angels descending with the revelation and charged with protecting the path [that the revelation travels along] from the meddling or intrusion of demons (*shayāṭīn*), so that it reaches the intended prophet in its pristine form. This may refer specifically to the Prophet Muḥammad, as can be gleaned from the following verses:

> *Knower of the unseen! He does not reveal His secrets to any except to him whom He chooses as a messenger. He makes a guard march before and after him, so that He may know that they have truly delivered the messages of their Lord, and He encompasses what is with them.* (72:26–28)

With these verses in mind, the first three verses of this chapter would mean, "I swear by the angels who line up along the path of revelation, who scare off the *shayāṭīn* and prevent them from tinkering with the revelation,

and who recite the 'reminder' (that is, the Qur'an) [1] to the Prophet." The "reminder" is either revelation in general, or the Qur'an specifically; the word *tāliyāt* suggests the latter.

This view is supported by (a) the mention, shortly after this verse, of shooting stars pelting the *shayāṭīn*, and (b) the verse: *So ask them, are they stronger in creation, or the ones We created?* (37:11)

This does not conflict with the way that the Qur'an attributes the revelation of the Qur'an to Jibrāʾīl alone, as in these verses:

> *Whoever is an enemy to Jibrāʾīl—[know that] he brought down the Qur'an to your heart.* (2:97)
>
> *The trustworthy spirit [Jibrāʾīl] revealed it to your heart.* (26:194)

This is because these angels would be his aides; Jibrāʾīl would still be carrying out this task [and there is nothing wrong with other angels participating in it]. God says:

> *In honored books, exalted, purified, in the hands of [angelic] scribes, noble and virtuous.* (80:13–16)
>
> *And we [angels] do not descend except by the command of your Lord.* (19:64)
>
> *And we are the ones who arrange themselves in ranks, and we are the ones who glorify [Allah].* (37:165–166)

This is similar to how the angelic messengers take the soul at the time of death; however, the Angel of Death is their head:

> *Until death comes to one of them, and Our messengers take their soul.* (6:61)
>
> *Say: The Angel of Death shall take your soul, and he has been tasked with you [all].* (32:11)

Some might question why a feminine plural adjective is used to describe angels [thereby implying that, in fact, these words do not describe angels at all].[2] However, there is no harm in using feminine adjectives to

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1 Lit. *dhikr* ("reminder"), a word the Qur'an uses to describe itself. *Tāliyāt* supports the idea that *dhikr* here is used to mean the Qur'an itself because the Qur'an is recited. [Trans.]

2 That is, even though the Qur'an does not portray angels in the Qur'an as inherently female, and, usually, sentient beings take an adjective which matches their gender (a male adjective for male sentient beings, a female adjective for female sentient beings, and a male adjective for a mixed group), the plural construct of "angels" ends with *-ah* which is, grammatically, a feminine marker; therefore, it is acceptable to use an adjective for feminine

describe the angels because it is used to describe a group [of angels], and the word for "angels" (*malāʾikah*) is grammatically feminine.

This is the first chapter of the Qur'an to open with oaths. In many places, God swears by many of His creations such as the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the night, the day, the angels, humanity, the land, and fruit. This is solely because these things enjoy the honor of being created and sustained by God; He is the source of all dignity and splendor.

إِنَّ إِلَٰهَكُمْ لَوَاحِدٌ ﴿٤﴾

(37:4) ***Surely, your Lord is One.***

This addresses humanity as a whole and is what is being sworn by the preceding three things. Arguments for this assertion will come later.

رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَرَبُّ الْمَشَارِقِ ﴿٥﴾

(37:5) ***The Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, and the Lord of the eastern horizons.***

There are three grammatical possibilities for this verse: (a) it is a second predicate affixed to the particle *inna* [in verse 37:4]; (b) it is a predicate of a sentence whose subject has been elided, such as, "He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth…"; or, (c) instead of being a predicate, it may be an apposition (*badal*) for the word *one* (*wāḥid*, 37:4).

These verses hint at why *your Allah is One*, just as the aforementioned things (*ṣāffāt, zājirāt,* and *tāliyāt*) that were sworn upon also hint at why *your Lord is one*. It is as if it says, "Truly, your Lord is one. The defining criterion for divinity—of being truly worthy of worship—is being a Lord who manages the affairs of creation. You acknowledge that He does this. He is the Lord of the heavens, the earth, and all between them; He manages their affairs and dispenses things throughout them."

And how could it be otherwise? He has the angels and the inhabitants of the heavens at His disposal when sending revelation to His prophet. They line up between heaven and earth and threaten off the *shayāṭīn*, lest they interfere. This is an example of how He manages what is between the heavens and the earth, including the *shayāṭīn*. Then the angels recite

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plural sentient beings with it. *Ṣāffāt, zājirāt,* and *tāliyāt* all end with the feminine plural marker *-āt*. [Trans.]

the revelation to the Prophet, thereby perfecting and nurturing humanity—whether they accept or reject it. The process of sending down the revelation involves the management of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them. And so He is the single Lord of all, the one who manages the affairs of creation, the true deity.

The Lord of the eastern horizons: This refers to (a) the different points along the eastern horizon that the sun rises from, which vary seasonally, (b) the places in the east where all the stars [including the sun] rise, or (c) eastern horizons in general.

The phrase *eastern horizons* [as opposed to, say, *western horizons*] is appropriate for the revelation because the revelation dawns from heaven through the angels. God says [regarding the heavenly realm]:

> *And he saw him on the clear horizon.* (81:23)
> *And he was upon the highest horizon.* (53:7)

إِنَّا زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةٍ الْكَوَاكِبِ ۝٦

(37:6) *We have gilded* (zayyannā) *the heavens above with ornaments of stars* (zīnatin al-kawākib).

Zīnah means "ornament", "decoration", or "adornment." *Kawākib* is either an explanation of or an apposition (*badal*) for *zīnah*. The word *zīnah* and its cognates are used elsewhere in the Qur'an to describe the sprinkling of stars above, as in:

> *We adorned* (zayyannā) *the heavens above with lanterns.* (41:12)
> *We have adorned* (zayyannā) *the heavens above with lamps.* (67:5)
> *Do they not look to the sky above, how We have built it and adorned it* (zayyannāhā)*?* (50:6)

It should be apparent the sky (*samāʾ*) is in fact one of the seven heavens which are mentioned in the Qur'an. This is the realm of the stars above the earth. However, some exegetes favor views which agree with ancient or modern cosmology.[1]

وَحِفْظًا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ مَارِدٍ ۝٧

(37:7) *As protection* (ḥifẓan) *from every rebellious shayṭān.*

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1 And ʿAllamāh puts forward a metaphorical understanding for "sky" or "heaven" (*samāʾ*) later in this section. [Trans.]

Protection (ḥifẓ[an]) is a direct object of an elided verb sharing the same word root. It would read something along the lines of, "We have protected them with a protection from every rebellious *shayṭān*." A *shayṭān* is a malevolent, wicked, vicious jinn wholly devoid of goodness.

لَا يَسَّمَّعُونَ إِلَى الْمَلَإِ الْأَعْلَىٰ وَيُقْذَفُونَ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ ﴿٨﴾

(37:8) *They cannot eavesdrop* (lā yassammaʿūna) *on the exalted assembly* (al-malaʾ al-aʿlā) *and are cast away from every side.*

The verb *yassammaʿūn* ("they cannot listen") comes from the verb *yatasamnaʿūn* and means "to listen to", "to eavesdrop". This is a figurative expression, showing how they are disallowed [from the heavenly realms] and driven away. In this regard, it describes all of the *shayāṭīn*. It should not be taken literally to mean that they are inherently unable to hear the assembly; otherwise, there would be no need to cast them out.

Among human beings, a *malaʾ* ("assembly", "council of elders") is comprised of their eminent chiefs or nobles. The *exalted assembly* (al-malaʾ al-aʿlā) is comprised of those whom the *shayāṭīn* want to listen to—that is to say, the honored angels who reside in the heights of the heavens. This is what is indicated by the verse:

> *We would have sent down to them from heaven an angel as a messenger.* (17:95)

"Eavesdropping on the exalted assembly" refers to their attempt to acquire news of the unseen pertaining to this terrestrial world, such as future events, and guarded secrets, as indicated in this verse:

> *And the shayāṭīn have not brought it down, nor would this befit them. They are unable to do this, for they are kept away from hearing.* (26:211–212)

God tells of what the jinn said:

> *We sought to reach heaven, but we found it filled with strong guards and flaming stars. And we used to sit in some of the sitting-places thereof to steal a hearing, but any [of us] who would listen now would find a flame lying in wait.* (72:8–9)

***And are cast away* (yuqdhafūn) *from every side* (jānib):** *Yuqdhafūn* means "throwing", "casting", "shooting". *Jānib* means "side".

دُحُورًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ وَاصِبٌ

(37:9) ***Driven off*** **(duḥūran)*****; for them is perpetual*** **(wāṣib)** ***torment.***

Duḥūr means "to repel", "to expel", "to banish". It is either (a) a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) taking on the meaning of an object, in the accusative case as a circumstantial adverb and meaning "they are in the state or condition of having been driven off"; (b) a causative object; or (c) a cognate object of [an omitted] verb sharing the same root letters. *Wāṣib* means "permanent", "lasting", or "binding".

إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ ﴿١٠﴾

(37:10) ***Except for the one who snatches a fragment*** **(khaṭifa khaṭfah)*****, then is chased off by a piercing flame.***

Khaṭfah means "snatching" or "nabbing". *Shihāb* means "shooting star" or "meteor", as seen in the sky. *Thāqib* means "piercing". The shooting stars here are described as "piercing" because they never miss their marks.

Khaṭfah here means "stealing a chance at listening". It is also used elsewhere to describe stealing a chance to listen in on something, as in:

> *Except for the one who steals a hearing, and is chased by a bright flame.* (15:18)

The use of "except" (*illā*) applies to the subject of the verb *they cannot listen*, although some exegetes consider it acceptable to have a clause with an exception by itself.

Altogether, these five verses mean: "We adorned the heaven closest to you—the lowest of the [seven] heavens—with ornaments, and these ornaments are the stars. We protected them every wicked *shayṭān* who is devoid of good. They are forbidden from listening in on the exalted assembly and learning news of the unseen. They are pelted away from every side. They have been banished, and they shall have a lasting punishment. This is apart from one who might catch a snippet of the discussion but who is then chased off with a piercing shooting star which never fails in its aim."

On the Meaning of *Shuhub* ("Shooting Stars", sing. *Shihāb*)

Exegetes have envisioned different things about what it means for the *shayāṭīn* to "steal a hearing" and to be pelted with shooting stars (*shuhub*). These views arise from what first comes to mind when reading or hearing the verses as well as traditions that say that, surrounding the earth,

there are celestial spheres where hosts of angels live. These realms have gates, and can only be accessed through these gates. Furthermore, in the lowest heaven, a contingent of angels lies in wait, shooting stars in hand, ambushing any of the *shayāṭīn* who would sneak up and eavesdrop, and striking them with these shooting stars.

Today, the [scientific] inaccuracy of these views on *shuhub* is clear. For that reason, many of these views—and they are quite many—have been abandoned, such as those in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* by al-Rāzī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* by al-Ālūsī, and others.

Possibly—and God knows best—these descriptions in the text are figurative, designed to convey images of supernatural realities in a way that the five senses can grasp. As God says:

> *These are the analogies We put forth to people, but only those with knowledge comprehend them*. (29:43)

This is common in the Qur'an—for instance, in the mention of the throne, the divine seat, the tablet, the Book, and other things which we have already mentioned or which will be mentioned later.

From this angle, "heaven" here would refer to the realm of the *malakūt* where the angels reside [rather than the visible sky]. Compared to the visible world, it would have a "higher horizon", just as, from the ground, the sky and the celestial bodies are at a higher horizon. When the verses describe the *shayāṭīn* approaching, attempting to eavesdrop, and being pelted with shooting stars, the verses would mean that the *shayāṭīn* approach the world of the angels to try to learn the secrets of creation and future events, but are cast away because they cannot bear the light of the *malakūt*. It could also mean that they seize the truth to weave it into deception, and so the angels repel them with the actual truth which dispels their lies.

This interpretation could be supported by the placement of these verses—namely, God places the account of the *shayāṭīn* attempting to eavesdrop and being pelted with shooting stars after (a) His oaths sworn by the angels of revelation and (b) mentioning how they protect the revelation from the intrusion of the *shayāṭīn*. And God knows best.

فَاسْتَفْتِهِمْ أَهُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ مَنْ خَلَقْنَا ۚ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِنْ طِينٍ لَازِبٍ ﴿١١﴾

(37:11) ***So ask them, are they stronger in creation, or the ones We created? We created them of firm*** **(lāzib)** ***clay.***

The adjective *lāzib* describes things which are firmly affixed or stuck to each other. *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān* says that *lāzib* means *lāzim* ("necessary", "binding", "affixed").

The ones We created refers to either (a) the angels who guard the revelation and shoot the shooting stars at the *shayāṭīn*, or (b) enormous creations other than human beings, such as the heavens, the earth, and the angels. The plural pronoun *them* [*hum*, which is typically applied to sentient, animate beings such as human beings or angels] may be used here more expansively to encompass both animate and inanimate creations [such as angels and the cosmos].

It means: "If God is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all between them, and the angels, then ask them [the people] to decide which was a greater matter: creating them or creating other things? They are the least of God's creation, for We created them from sticky clay; they hold no power over Us."

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says regarding *by those who array themselves in ranks* (37:1):
These are the angels and the prophets.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, al-Qummī relates that Imām al-Ṣādiq said:[1]
The Commander of the Faithful said: "These stars in the sky are cities [or civilizations, *madāʾin*] like the cities on earth."

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related from Abū al-Jārūd that Imām al-Bāqir said regarding *perpetual torment (*ᶜadhābᵘⁿ wāṣib*)*:
It means that it is unending and agonizing, reaching their hearts.

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related that the Prophet said when describing his night ascension (*miᶜrāj*):
Jibraʾīl and I ascended towards the heaven of this world. In it was an angel called Ismāᶜīl, who was responsible [to repel] the ones who sneak up and eavesdrop, as God, the Exalted and Glorious, described in: *Except for the one who snatches a fragment, then is chased off by a piercing flame.* (37:10) Surrounding him were seven thousand angels; under the command of each angel were seven thousand more.

1 He relates this from his father and Yaᶜqūb ibn Yazīd from Ibn Abī ᶜUmayr from some of the companions of the Imāms.

Author's comments: Narrations on this topic are many. We mentioned some of them in our exegesis on *Except for the one who steals a hearing, and is chased by a bright flame* (15:18). Others will be mentioned in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Mulk and Sūrah al-Jinn, God willing.

(5) In *Nahj al-Balāghah*, it says [that Imām ʿAlī said]:
God—the Exalted—gathered dust from the high, rugged lands and the lowlands, the pleasant lands and the salty lands and worked it with water until it became pure, then kneaded it with moisture until it became sticky.

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Verses 12–70

This passage tells of how they mocked the signs of God. It recounts some of their claims, which were founded upon rejection of the truth and denial of the resurrection. It then refutes them through an account of what will transpire upon the resurrection—in particular, the intensity and variety of the punishment that will befall them, and how God will honor His purified servants with blessings and esteem.

It also chronicles the quarreling between the inhabitants of the fire on the day of resurrection as well as the conversation between some of the inhabitants of the garden and some of the inhabitants of hell.

بَلْ عَجِبْتَ وَيَسْخَرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾ وَإِذَا ذُكِّرُوا لَا يَذْكُرُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

(37:12–13) ***Indeed, you marvel while they mock, and when they are reminded, they mind not.***

Meaning, "You are astonished, O Muḥammad, at how they treat you like a liar while you are inviting them to the word of truth. They are joking about and making light of (a) your astonishment towards them, or (b) your calling them to the truth, or (c) because when they are reminded of the signs of God leading to divine oneness and the religion of truth, they neither mind nor heed."

وَإِذَا رَأَوْا آيَةً يَسْتَسْخِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(37:14) ***And when they see a sign, they seek to scoff*** **(yastaskhirūn).**

Majmaᶜ al-Bayān says:

> *Sakhira* and *istaskhara* mean the same thing [namely, "mocking", "making fun of", "scoffing at"].

It means, "When these polytheists see a miraculous sign of God, like the Qur'an or the splitting of the moon, they make fun of it."

وَقَالُوا إِنْ هَٰذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٥﴾

(37:15) ***And say, "This is nothing but clear sorcery."***

Their use of the word *this* (hādhā) to describe the signs of God shows that they cannot imagine they are anything significant, and this is the strongest way they could belittle and mock it.

أَإِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ ﴿١٦﴾ أَوَآبَاؤُنَا الْأَوَّلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(37:16–17) ***"What? When we die, and are but dust and bones, we will be raised? Or our ancient forefathers?"***

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They are denying the resurrection solely on the grounds that it seems impossible, for they could not imagine that a person could die; their body would vanish, turned back into to dust and bones; and then the person would come back in their original form.

One of the things that shows that their objections were based only on their belief that this was impossible is the way they repeat their rhetorical questions, asking once about themselves and then about their forefathers. Their minds simply couldn't handle the idea of their forefathers being raised when nothing remained of them save tales. Even more incredible was the idea that they themselves would be raised! Were their denial of being resurrected based on the premise that they would cease to exist at the time of death and therefore it would be impossible for them to return, this would hold true both for themselves and their forefathers, and they would have no need to repeat the question about their forefathers.

قُلْ نَعَمْ وَأَنْتُمْ دَاخِرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾ فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَإِذَا هُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(37:18–19) ***Say, "Yes, and you shall be abject." It shall be but a single cry, and—behold!—they shall see.***

God commands His prophet to reply to them that they will be resurrected.

And you shall be abject **(dākhirūn)*:*** Meaning, they will be humiliated and belittled. This is, in truth, an argument for the power and immediacy of the [divine] will. For His command is such that when He wills something, He says to it "be" and it is. Thus, He follows *you shall be abject* with: *It shall be but a single cry, and—behold!—they shall see.* (37:19). God has said:

> *Allah's is the unseen of the heavens and the earth, and the matter of the hour is naught but the blink of an eye, or something quicker. Allah has power over all things.* (16:77)

It shall be* (fa-innamā) *but a single cry, and—behold!—they shall see: The conjunction *fa-* demonstrates cause and effect. Therefore, this sentence expresses the reason behind *and you shall be abject*. The expression *cry* indicates their humiliation.

وَقَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا هَٰذَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ ﴿٢٠﴾ هَٰذَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(37:20–21) ***And they will say, "Woe be upon us! This is the day of requital! This is the day on which [everyone] will be sorted out, [the day] that you used to deny."***

This verse is connected to *they shall see* (37:19), showing that they will be amazed and astonished, racking their brains, then realizing that it is the day of resurrection on which judgment shall be meted out, and that they had been warned about it with respect to their faithlessness and denial. For this reason, they speak of it as "the day of judgment (*yawm al-dīn*)" and not "the day of resurrection (*yawm al-baʿth*)". The verse is in the past tense to show that it is a matter that will have certainly happened.[1]

This is the day on which [everyone] will be sorted out* (yawm al-faṣl[2]), *[the day] that you used to deny: Some exegetes say that some of the people will be speaking these words to other people. Other exegetes say that the angels or God will be telling them this. This latter view is reinforced by the subsequent verse. *Faṣl* means "distinguishing between two things". It is called the "day of sorting" either because it is the day on which truth shall be distinguished from falsehood through divine judgment, or else because the guilty will be separated from the God-conscious. God says: *And stay apart today, O guilty ones!* (36:59)

احْشُرُوا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَأَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَاهْدُوهُمْ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطِ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٢٣﴾

(37:22–23) ***Gather those who were unjust and their associates and what they used to worship other than Allah, then lead them on***

1 The use of the past tense here and elsewhere in this sūrah is not reflected in translation. [Trans.]

2 Lit. "The Day of Sorting." [Trans.]

the path to hell.

God is speaking these words to the angels. It means, "We will have said to the angels: 'Gather them.'" Some exegetes hold that some of the angels will say this to the others.

Ḥashr, according to al-Rāghib, means "to take a group [of people] out of their domiciles and drive them to war or something similar".

According to the next verse, *those who were unjust* refers to the polytheists—not all polytheists, but, rather, those who stubbornly rejected the truth and fought against it. God speaks of them in:

> *And a caller shall have called out among them, "The curse of Allah is upon the unjust who kept people away people from the path of Allah and sought evil and denied the hereafter."* (7:44–45)

Those who were unjust is in the past tense because it acts as an adjective [as in the expression "the unjust people"]. *Those who were unjust* does not encompass everyone who ever did anything unjust, even once; rather, it identifies those whose main feat this world was injustice, as if it were to ask "what did so-and-so do in his life?" and someone were to reply "injustice". Therefore the verb acts as a descriptor. This occurs frequently in the Qur'an; for instance, in:

> *And those who were conscious of Allah will be impelled towards paradise in droves.* (39:73)
>
> *And those who rejected [truth] shall be impelled towards hell in droves.* (39:73)
>
> *For those who did good is good, and more.* (10:26)

And their associates* (azwājuhum)*: The most apparent meaning of *azwājuhum* (lit. "companions", "spouses", "partners") is "their associates among the *shayāṭīn*". God says:

> *We appoint a shayṭān as a companion for whoever turns away from the remembrance of the Merciful… until he comes to Us and says, "Alas, if only the distance between the east and west had been between me and you! What an evil companion!"* (43:36–38)

Some exegetes maintain that *azwājuhum* here means "their like" or "their peers"—for instance, adulterers will be raised with adulterers, or drinkers will be raised with drinkers. However, the problem with this interpretation is that it requires *those who were unjust* to mean "a specific group of each type of sinner", whereas the phrasing at the end of the verse does not support this interpretation.

Some exegetes also say that *azwājuhum* means "their disbelieving wives"; however, this interpretation, like the previous, is weak.

And what* (mā) *they used to worship other than Allah: This comes across as referring to the false idols that they used to worship, given that the word *mā* in this verse comes across as parallel to the usage in this verse:

> *You and what (*mā*) you used to worship other than Allah shall be the firewood for hell.* (21:98)

Possibly, *mā* could encompass sentient beings which are worshipped, like the Pharaohs and Nimrods of the world. However, the following verse excludes the angels or Jesus from this use of *mā*:

> *Those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far off from it.* (21:101)

***Then lead them on the path to hell* (jaḥīm):** *Jaḥīm* is one of the names of hell in the Qur'an. According to al-Rāghib, it comes from the word *jaḥamah*, meaning "fiercely burning fire".

Being "led" along the path to hell means being delivered to it and thrown into it. Some exegetes say that "led" here is sarcastic.[1] *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:

It is called "guidance" because it is in lieu of being guided to paradise. It is similar to the verse, *give them glad tidings of severe torment* (84:24), in which glad tidings of hell are given in lieu of glad tidings of bliss.

وَقِفُوهُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ مَسْئُولُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾ مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنَاصَرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾ بَلْ هُمُ الْيَوْمَ مُسْتَسْلِمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(37:24–26) ***And stop them; they shall be questioned. "What is wrong with you? Why do you not help each other?" Nay, on that day they shall be submissive.***

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

> *Waqaftu* is used as a transitive and intransitive verb; that is, "I myself stopped" or "I stopped him". Some of the Banū Tamīm use the expression *awqaftu al-dābah wa al-dār* ("I dedicated the animal and the house").

1 This is because *fa-ahdūhum* comes from the same root as *hidāyah*, which is generally used for showing someone the way or for religious/ethical guidance, which is meant to save a person from torment. [Trans.]

And stop them; they shall be questioned: Meaning, "restrain them so that they may be questioned."

The context indicates that being stopped and questioned will happen along the path to hell.

Exegetes have differed over what they will actually be questioned about. Some say that they will be questioned over *there is no god but Allah*. Others say that they will be taunted by being asked about cool water. And others say they will be questioned about their allegiance (*wilāyah*) towards ʿAlī.

Even if these views are correct, they only provide examples of what they will be questioned about; the context demonstrates that the questioning will include "*what is wrong with you? Why do you not help each other?*" Meaning, why don't they come to each other's aid, as they did in this world when assisting each other with their needs and goals? As for what is recited from *nay, on this day, they shall be submissive*, it means that they shall be humbled rather than proud. This shows that the intent behind "*what is wrong with you? Why do you not help each other?*" is that they will be questioned about how their arrogance kept them from obeying the truth [i.e. God] in this world.

When they are asked why they do not help each other, they are really being asked why they were so arrogant when they were alive. It is clear that what they are being asked about is all of the truth they turned away from in this world—for instance, true beliefs and righteous deeds—in the guise of being asked why they did not help each other.

وَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾ قَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَأْتُونَنَا عَنِ
الْيَمِينِ ﴿٢٨﴾ قَالُوا بَلْ لَمْ تَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾ وَمَا كَانَ لَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ
سُلْطَانٍ ۖ بَلْ كُنْتُمْ قَوْمًا طَاغِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾ فَحَقَّ عَلَيْنَا قَوْلُ رَبِّنَا ۖ إِنَّا لَذَائِقُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

(37:27–31) ***And some will approach others, questioning each other. They will say, "You used to come to us from the right." They will say, "No, you were not believers. And we had no authority over you; you were a rebellious people. So the sentence of our Lord has come to pass against us; we shall taste it."***

This is an argument that will take place on the day of resurrection between those who were followed and their followers. The verb *questioning*

each other (yatasāʾalūn) conveys a flavor of censure and blame in how they are questioning each other. The followers will ask those whom they followed, "Why did you misguide us?", and those who were followed will say, "Why did you accept this from us, when we had no real authority over you?"

And some will approach others **(baʿḍuhum ʿalā baʿḍ)**, ***questioning each other:*** The first *baʿḍ* refers to the ones who are putting forward their objections, and the second *baʿḍ* refers to those who are being accused. This is what is can be understood from *questioning each other* because *questioning each other* implies quarreling.

They will say, "You used to come to us from the right": Meaning, in the guise of well-wishing. The word *yamīn* ("right") is used often in this sense; for instance, in:

> *And the companions of the right hand—what are the companions of the right hand?* (56:27)

It means, "You used to approach us as if you were wishing well for us and wanting good for us, but now you are cutting us off in our path, blocking us from [eternal] happiness, and misguiding us."

Some exegetes say that "right" here means "religion (*dīn*)". This is similar to the previous view. Other exegetes say "right" means "power" and "might", as in verse 37:93 (*then he turned upon them and struck them with his right hand*). However, this view is open to doubt, keeping in mind how those who were followed respond.

They will say, "No, you were not believers. And we had no authority over you; you were a rebellious people": This is the reply of those who were followed. Through it, they absolve themselves of leading their followers into misery, and tell their followers that it was their fault for choosing to follow them.

They will say, "No, you were not believers" means "They will say, 'We were not the reason you committed crimes and destroyed yourselves through abandoning faith. You were not faithful; we were not the ones who stripped you of faith.'"

"And we had no authority over you": This is another way of bespeaking of their obligation to surrender to the truth [rather than follow misguided leaders]. It is as if it is saying, "If it were necessary for you to have faith, we would not have had the power to seize it from you and deprive you of it." The only reason the leaders had power is because their followers ceded power over themselves to their leaders.

"You were a rebellious* (ṭāghīn) *people": *Ṭughyān* [that is, *ṭāghīn*] means "crossing the boundary". It explicates *you were not believers.* It is as if it is saying: "You were not destroyed only because you lacked faith. Rather you were a people who crossed all bounds. Like us—we were arrogant and rebellious. We all insisted on abandoning the path of guidance and going the wrong way. And so, we deserve the decree of punishment which God established in:

> *... hell lies in wait, a place of resort for the rebellious* (78:21–22) and, *... then as for him who is inordinate, and prefers the life of this world, then surely the hell, that is the abode* (79:37–39)."

To support this meaning, *you were a rebellious people* is followed by *so the sentence of our Lord has come to pass against us; we shall taste it.* "Tasting" here means "tasting the punishment".

فَأَغْوَيْنَاكُمْ إِنَّا كُنَّا غَاوِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(37:32) ***We led you astray; we ourselves were straying.***

This is part of the chain of cause and effect here, involving the final cause of their destruction, and terminating in the decree of punishment being passed against them. Rebelliousness begets misguidance, and then the fire of hell. God said to Iblīs [Satan]:

> *You shall not have any authority over any of My believing servants except for the deviant who follow you, and they shall all meet in hell* (15:42–43).

It is as if it is saying: "Once you embraced obstinate rebellion, you bound yourselves to misguidance at our hands although we had no authority over you apart from the fact you followed us and affixed yourselves to us. So our characteristics spread to you—namely, misguidance, and misguidance only begets misguidance. You can only pour out of a container what is in it. You were not forced or enslaved to do this; rather, you had freedom of choice when you set out on the path of destruction until you reached this plight—namely, misguidance. Therefore, the divine sentence is merited against you."

فَإِنَّهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُشْتَرِكُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾ إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾
إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(37:33–35) ***On that day, they will share the punishment with each***

other. Thus do We deal with the guilty. When it was said to them "there is no god but Allah", they waxed arrogant.

The pronoun *they* refers to both the followers and the followed. They shall share in the punishment since they shared in injustice and crimes; one will have no advantage over the other.

Some exegetes have made a case that those who are doing the misguiding shall have a more severe punishment. This is because they will be faced with their own burdens as well as the burdens of those whom they misguided. This verse does not necessitate that the leaders and followers bear equal burdens; rather, it shows that since they both partook in oppression and crime, they shall both partake in the punishment before them in ways that are mete to their circumstances. The leaders and followers may each face their own stripes of punishment; as God says:

> *And they shall carry their burdens and other burdens with their burdens.* (29:31)
>
> *"Our Lord! They led us astray, so double their punishment in the fire." He said, "The punishment shall be doubled for all of you, but you do not know."* (7:38)

Thus do We deal with the guilty: This emphasizes that they merit punishment. It can be deduced from *when it was said to them "there is no god but Allah", they waxed arrogant* that *the guilty here* refers to the polytheists. It means that when they were presented with the notion of divine unity, that they might believe in it, or the word of sincerity, that they might speak it, they remained arrogant and refused to accept it.

وَيَقُولُونَ أَئِنَّا لَتَارِكُو آلِهَتِنَا لِشَاعِرٍ مَجْنُونٍ ﴿٣٦﴾ بَلْ جَاءَ بِالْحَقِّ وَصَدَّقَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(37:36–37) ***And said, "Should we give up our gods for a mad poet?" Nay, he has come with the truth and confirmed the messengers [before him].***

They said this to deny the message after their arrogance prevented them from accepting divine unity and they rejected it.

Nay, he has come with the truth and confirmed the messengers [before him] refutes their accusation of him being a *mad poet*. When they accused the Prophet of being merely a poet, and insane or possessed, they were really casting aspersions on the book of God by dismissing it as poetry

or maddened ravings. This is the response—that what the Prophet has brought is the truth, and in it is confirmation of the previous messages. It is neither inane poetry nor maddened ravings, nor is it saying something unprecedented or novel.

إِنَّكُمْ لَذَائِقُو الْعَذَابِ الْأَلِيمِ ﴿٣٨﴾

(37:38) ***Surely you will taste the painful punishment.***

This threatens them with punishment for their arrogance and for trying to shoot down the truth with falsehood.

وَمَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(37:39) ***And you will only be requited for what you did.***

Meaning, there will be no injustice in it; rather, their very same deeds will be tossed back at them.

إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ رِزْقٌ مَعْلُومٌ ﴿٤١﴾

(37:40–49) ***Except the purified servants of Allah; for them is a known sustenance—fruits, and they shall be highly honored in gardens of delight, on thrones, facing each other. A bowl of clear spring water shall be passed round, white, delicious to those who drink of it. No headiness lies therein, nor shall they be intoxicated. And with them shall be maidens of modest gaze with lustrous eyes, as if they were hidden eggs.***

This clause of exception here is absolute [meaning that nothing in the group which is excepted—namely, the purified servants of God—is included in what it is being excepted from]. It applies to either (a) *you* in *you will taste* or (b) *you* in *you will only be requited for what you did*. One can make a case for either view. In the first case, it means that the purified servants of God are those who have a known sustenance and will not be tasting the severe torment. In the second case, it means that the purified servants of God are those who have a known sustenance above and beyond being requited for their deeds; this will be discussed shortly.

The possibility that the exception is inclusive [that is, those in the clause of exception—namely, *the purified servants of Allah*—are also included in what they are being excepted from] is weak and requites

some finagling.

In calling them "the purified servants of God", God, the Exalted, has established that they His servants, and a servant has neither his own will nor his own deeds. They [that is, the purified servants of God] only want what God wants and only work for Him.

Then it establishes that they have been purified. This is *mukhlaṣūn* not *mukhliṣūn*, meaning that God has purified them, and so they do not associate anything with Him. So they are not attached to anything other than God, such as the ornaments of the worldly life or blessings of the hereafter; there is nothing in their hearts but God.

Clearly, those who fit this description delight in loftier blessings and enjoy a different sustenance than others, even if they share in the basics like food and drink. This reinforces the view that *they have a known sustenance* indicates that their sustenance is heavenly. They are the purified, sincere worshippers with a specific sustenance unlike any other's. Others cannot dip into it, even if they too receive something called "sustenance".

All of this means that they have a unique sustenance, specific to them. *Known*—in *a known sustenance*—is a figure of speech indicating that it is distinct and selected; a similar example is *And there is nothing with us that is not in a known place* [37:164]. The demonstrative pronoun *ūlāʾika* ("they") gives a sense of them being far-off and hence demonstrates their lofty position.

Some exegetes maintain that *a known sustenance* simply means that its characteristics are known—for instance, it is unending and within reach, pleasing to behold, tasty, and fragrant. Others claim that *known* in *a known sustenance* means that they receive their sustenance at a known time as in *And for them is a known sustenance, morning and evening* (19:62). Still others say that *a known sustenance* means Paradise. However, all of these views are shaky.

From here, it becomes clear that taking the verse *except for the purified servants of Allah* (37:40) as an exception to the implied pronoun *they* in *and you will only be requited for what you did* (wa mā tujzawn, 37:39) is problematic, as was previously indicated.

فَوَاكِهُ ۖ وَهُمْ مُكْرَمُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٤٣﴾

(37:42–43) *Fruits* (fawākih), *and they shall be highly honored in gardens of delight.*

Fruits (fawākih) is the plural of *fākihah*, meaning "enjoying fruits". Here, it clarifies their *known sustenance*. God has paired it with *they shall be highly honored* to show that this sustenance—that is, fruits—is different from others' sustenance, for it goes hand-in-hand with their being honored and selected by God. Therefore, it is theirs alone; no one else partakes of it.

Adding *gardens* to *delight* (naʿīm) also shows their unique position, for verses including A*nd they are the ones who Allah has blessed* (4:6) and *and I have completed My blessing upon you* (5:3) show that the reality of this "delight" or "blessing" (*niʿmah*) is actually *walāyah*, meaning that God Himself oversees what pertains to His servants.

عَلَىٰ سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(37:44) *On thrones* (surur), *facing each other.*

Surur is the plural of *sarīr* ("throne", "elevated seat", "seat", "bed"), in the conventional meaning. "Facing" each other means that they will be convivially acquainted with one another and enjoy gazing at each other (that is, they will not be facing away from each other, such that one person would be looking at the back of someone else's head).

يُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِكَأْسٍ مِنْ مَعِينٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

(37:45) *A bowl* (kaʾs) *of clear* (maʿīn) *spring water shall be passed round.*

A *kaʾs* is a drinking-cup or vessel. Many grammarians say that a drinking-cup may not be called a *kaʾs* unless it contains something to drink; if it is empty, then it is called a *qadaḥ*. *Maʿīn* comes across as referring to water when it is clear and flowing across the land. The intent here behind the cup being "clear" is that it contains a pure drink with an exquisite taste; thus, it is subsequently described as *white*.

بَيْضَاءَ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(37:46) *White, delicious* (ladhdhatin) *to those who drink of it.*

Meaning, its pureness in its whiteness makes it delicious to drink. *Ladhdhah* is either a verbal noun used as an exaggerated adjective or—according to what is said—the feminine form of *ladhdh*, meaning "delicious".

لَا فِيهَا غَوْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ عَنْهَا يُنْزَفُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(37:47) ***No headiness*** **(ghawl)** ***lies therein, nor shall they be intoxicated*** **(yunzafūn).**

Ghawl means "harm" or "decay". Al-Rāgib says: "*Ghawl* is when something is destroyed leaving no trace."

When wine is described as not having *ghawl*, it means that it causes no harm. *Yunzafūn* means "to be divested of one's intellect through drunkenness". Originally, it meant "taking away a thing in stages". All in all, the verse means, "That wine does not contain the same ills as worldly wine, and it does not make people drunkenly brainless."

وَعِنْدَهُمْ قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ عِينٌ ﴿٤٨﴾ ك

(37:48) ***And with them shall be maidens of modest gaze*** **(qāṣirāt al-ṭarf)** ***with lustrous eyes.***

This describes the heavenly maidens (*ḥūr*) which they shall be granted. *Qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* (here, translated as *of modest gaze*) is a figure of speech indicating that their gaze shall be coy and coquettish. This understanding is reinforced by the mention of their eyes afterwards. It is the plural of *ʿaynāʾ* which is the feminine of *aʿyun* ("eyes") and means large, beautiful eyes.

Some exegetes say that *qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* means that their eyes will only be for their husbands, and they will not want anyone else because their love for them will be so great. They take *ʿAyn* here to mean that the middle of their eyes will be intensely black, contrasted against the whites.

كَأَنَّهُنَّ بَيْضٌ مَكْنُونٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

(37:49) ***As if they were hidden eggs*** **(bayḍ maknūn).**

Bayḍ has the conventional meaning of "eggs". It is a collective noun (meaning eggs in general); a single egg is called a *bayḍah*. *Maknūn* means "hidden" or "treasured away". Some exegetes say that the intent of comparing them to eggs is to give the impression that it is as if they are hidden away by feathers in a nest, or something similar, and are untouched, sheltered from the dust. Some exegetes say that the intent behind comparing them to eggs is that it compares them to the inside of an egg before it is

cracked open and before anyone can lay hands on it.

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾ قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي كَانَ لِي
قَرِينٌ ﴿٥١﴾ يَقُولُ أَإِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُصَدِّقِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾ أَإِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا
أَإِنَّا لَمَدِينُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾ قَالَ هَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُطَّلِعُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾ فَاطَّلَعَ فَرَآهُ فِي سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ
﴿٥٥﴾ قَالَ تَاللَّهِ إِنْ كِدْتَ لَتُرْدِينِ ﴿٥٦﴾ وَلَوْلَا نِعْمَةُ رَبِّي لَكُنْتُ مِنَ
الْمُحْضَرِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾ أَفَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَيِّتِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾ إِلَّا مَوْتَتَنَا الْأُولَىٰ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ
﴿٥٩﴾ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٦٠﴾ لِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا فَلْيَعْمَلِ الْعَامِلُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(37:50–61) ***Then some of them will turn to each other and question each other. One will say, "I had a companion who used to say to me, 'What? Do you really believe that? What? When we are dead and dust and bones, we will be judged?'" He will say, "Do you [want to] find out?" Then he will look and see him in the midst of hell. He will say, "By Allah! You almost made me perish! Were it not for the favor of My Lord, I would have been summoned there! Is it such that we will not die except for our first death, and we will not be punished? This is a great victory!" For this, then, let those who would strive, strive.***

This tells of a conversation between some of the people in paradise. Some people will ask what happened to others or speak of what happened when they were alive. The conversation ends with them speaking to some of the people in the deepest firepits of hell.

Then some of them will turn to each other and question each other: The pronoun *them* refers to some of the sincere, purified servants of God in paradise. It speaks of their questioning each other about others and what happened to them.

One will say, "I had a companion* (qarīn)*": Meaning that one of the people in paradise involved in this discussion will mention a specific human companion that he had when he was alive. (This is what the surrounding verses indicate.)

Some exegetes say that *companion* (qarīn) here refers to one of the *shayāṭīn* which is affixed to a person. However, while the Qur'an establishes that people can have demonic companions turning them away from the

remembrance of God,[1] being a sincere, purified servant of God would render one immune to such demonic companionship or from being influenced by the *shayāṭīn* at all. For instance, in the Qur'an, Iblīs [Satan] says that they are exempt from his lures:

> *Iblīs said, "By Your might! I shall tempt all of them except for Your sincere servants."* (38:83)

Yes, possibly Satan could finagle his way into their presence in ways other than directly influencing their hearts; however, this does not involve being swayed by a personal minor demon.

Who used to say to me, "What? Do you really believe that? What? When we are dead and dust and bones, we will be judged* (madīnūn)*?" The subject of *who used to say* is the companion (*qarīn*), and the [meaning of the] object of *muṣaddaqīn* (*you believe*, a verbal noun) is "being resurrected for judgment". This is conveyed in the previous sentences (*What? When we are dead and dust and bones, will we be judged?*). *Madīnūn* means "recompensed" or "judged".

In other words, it is as if they are saying, "I had a companion who spurned the idea that we would be raised for judgment. "What?" he used to say. "When we have died, and crumbled to dust and bones—when our bodies have decayed and turned into other things—will we be returned to life and judged? No one could believe this."

He will say, "Do you [want to] find out* (muṭṭaliʿūn)*?" The pronoun *he* refers to the speaker, who was mentioned previously. *Muṭṭaliʿūn* [here] means "to look down at", "to oversee". It means, "The person who was speaking before will ask some people in paradise, 'Do you want to look down towards the people in the fire so you can see my companion and what it is like for him in the fire?"

Then he will look and see him in the midst of hell* (sawāʾ al-jaḥīm)*: *Sawāʾ* means "the middle". It can be used to the describe the middle of the road (*sawāʾ al-ṭarīq*). It means that the speaker, who has already been identified, will look down at the fire and see his companion in the middle of it.

He will say, "By Allah! You almost made me* (in kidta) *perish

1 For instance, *Whoever is blinded from the remembrance of Allah, We will appoint for him a* shayṭān *as a companion* (qarīn) (43:36). The idea that all or most people are assigned a jinn-companion (*qarīn*) which tries to misguide them is more prevalent in the Sunni tradition because of prominent Sunni hadith discussing this. [Trans.]

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(tardīn)*!":* The particle *in* lightens the severity of the expression. The verb *tardīn* means "to fall from a high place", like a cliff; it is used here figuratively to mean "destruction". It means, "I swear by God, you came close to destroying me and making me fall into that hellpit that you fell into."

Were it not for the favor* (niʿmah) *of My Lord, I would have been summoned there* (min al-muḥḍārīn)*!: Here, by *niʿmah* (favor) is meant "blessing", "divine grace", and "divine guidance". *Summoned* here means "summoned for punishment". *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:

"Summoning" (*ihḍār*, the root of *muḥḍārīn*) is only used for something ominous.

It means, "Were it not for the grace and guidance of my Lord, I would have been summoned forth to the punishment like you!"

Is it such that we will not die except for our first death, and we will not be punished? This question is not really a question but rather expresses their wonder. The intent here by "the first death" is passing away from the worldly life. There is another death to follow in the *barzakh* (the intermediary realm after death) which is alluded to in the verse:

> *Our Lord! You have caused us to die twice and revived us twice* (40:11).

However, it is disregarded here because the death that they are speaking about is the one that people swore was the absolute end—that is, death in the worldly, conventional sense.

It means—keeping in mind there are some things that are elided or metaphorical—that the speaker, who has already be identified, is speaking to himself and his companions and saying in wonder, "Will we live forever with blessings and grace? We will not die apart from our first death, and we will not be punished?"

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

> [Through this question] they affirm this is true, without any doubt. They said this out of joy and redoubled delight, even though they already knew they would enter the garden. It is as if a man is given a large sum of money and exclaims, "All of this is for me?"—even though he already knows that it is his. Or, another example is this verse: "By Ṭā Ḥā, is this Mecca that I see with mine eyes? Me, here?"[1]

1 This verse is attributed to al-Shiblī who is said to have uttered it upon arrival to the Kaʿbah and repeated it until he swooned. [Trans.]

For this reason, this verse is followed by, *This is a great victory!*

This is a great victory: With this, the person finishes speaking. It extols the magnitude of the eternal gift and being saved from punishment, and expresses gratitude for these blessings.

For this, then, let those who would strive, strive: The verses suggest that this is still part of what the person is saying. It means, in this abode of responsibility [the material world], let the strivers strive for this great victory (or reward). Some exegetes say that God or the inhabitants of the garden are speaking here.

Know that they have various arguments for why they attribute these words to someone other than the person who was originally speaking, such as God, the angels, or people in the garden. However, what we have said is best suited to the context of the verses.

أَذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ نُزُلًا أَمْ شَجَرَةُ الزَّقُّومِ ﴿٦٢﴾ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهَا فِتْنَةً لِلظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٦٣﴾ إِنَّهَا
شَجَرَةٌ تَخْرُجُ فِي أَصْلِ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٦٤﴾ طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُ رُءُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ
﴿٦٥﴾فَإِنَّهُمْ لَآكِلُونَ مِنْهَا فَمَالِئُونَ مِنْهَا الْبُطُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّ لَهُمْ عَلَيْهَا
لَشَوْبًا مِنْ حَمِيمٍ ﴿٦٧﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّ مَرْجِعَهُمْ لَإِلَى الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٦٨﴾ إِنَّهُمْ أَلْفَوْا آبَاءَهُمْ
ضَالِّينَ ﴿٦٩﴾ فَهُمْ عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ يُهْرَعُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(37:62–70) ***Is that a better welcome or the tree of Zaqqūm? We have made it a trial for the unjust. It is a tree sprouting from the root of hell, its spathes like demons' heads. They shall eat from it and fill their bellies with it, then drink a brew of boiling liquid; then their return shall be to hell. They found their fathers going astray, yet they hastened in their footsteps.***

This compares what God has prepared as a welcome for the people in paradise (a "noble sustenance") with what God has prepared as a "welcome" for the people of the fire—the tree of Zaqqūm whose spathes are demon's heads, and a boiling fluid to drink (*ḥamīm*).

Is that a better welcome or the tree of Zaqqūm? This alludes to the noble sustenance mentioned previously which is ready for those joining the people in paradise. *Nuzul* refers to what is prepared for the arrival of a guest and offered to them when they arrive, such as fruits or similar things.

Zaqqūm—according to what has been said—is the name of a bitter,

foul-smelling tree with small leaves. When its sap touches a person's body, it causes swelling. It grows in Tihāmah[1] and on the outskirts of barren deserts. This tree and the tree in the verse share the same name because of their similarities. Some say that the Quraysh were unfamiliar with this tree; this will be discussed more in the section on narrations.

The word "better" (*khayr*) in the verse does not mean "one thing which has a higher level of excellence than another", for there is no good in the tree of Zaqqūm at all. Instead, it is is similar to the verse *what is with Allah is better than vain diversion* (62:11). The surrounding verses indicate that these words are being spoken by God.

We have made it a trial* (fitnah) *for the unjust: The pronoun "it" refers to the tree of Zaqqūm. *Trial* (fitnah) means "calamity" and "torment".

It is a tree sprouting from the root of hell: This describes the Zaqqūm tree. The "root" of hell is its bottom or depths. One should not be astonished that a tree will grow in and survive the fire, for human life will also subsist eternally in it, and that is more astonishing. And God does what He wills.

Its spathes* (ṭalʿuhā) *like demons' heads: *Ṭalʿ* is the first fruit of a palm tree, or a tree in general. The fruit of the tree of Zaqqūm is compared to demons' heads keeping in mind that most people imagine demons in the ugliest forms, just like most people imagine angels in the handsomest and most beautiful forms. God relates [the words of the women of Egypt]: *This is not a man—this is nothing but a noble angel!* (12:31). This explanation refutes the argument that "a thing must be compared to something the listener knows about, and no one knows what demons' heads look like".

They shall eat from it and fill their bellies with it: The conjunction *fā*ʾ serves to explain that this tree is a welcoming repast for the oppressors. *And fill their bellies with it* shows that they will be afflicted with a severe hunger to the point that they will be starving for anything, whatever it may be.

Then drink a brew* (lashawb^{an}) *of boiling liquid* (ḥamīm)*: *Shawb* means "a mixture" or "a blend". *Ḥamīm* is extremely hot water. It means, "In addition, those oppressors will drink a mixture of boiling hot water which will meld with the fruit of the Zaqqūm tree that is in their stomachs."

Then their return shall be to hell: Meaning that after drinking the

1 The intensely hot western coastal plain facing the Red Sea along most of present-day Saudi Arabia and Yemen. [Trans.]

boiling hot water, they will return to hell and abide in its punishment. This verse suggests that the boiling water is outside of hell (*jaḥīm*) itself.

They found* (alfaw) *their fathers going astray, yet they hastened in their footsteps: The verb *alfaw* means "they found" or "they chanced upon". *Yuhraʿūn* means "rushing towards" or "hastening towards". It means that the reason that they are eating and drinking these things, then returning to hell, is because they found their fathers astray and yet persisted in copying them and following them. They were their ancestors and their authorities. So they hurried in their footsteps and thus earned this welcoming repast and return to hell.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Ibn Mundhir from Ibn Jurayḥ regarding *indeed, you marvel* (37:12) that the Prophet said: I marvel at the Qur'an when it is sent down, whereas the misguided children of Adam mock it.

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says:
Gather those who were unjust (37:22) [refers to] those who were unjust regarding the right of the family of Muḥammad. *Their associates* (37:22, *wa azwājuhum*) means "those similar to them" [as opposed to specifically their spouses].

Author's comments: The first part of this narration is an example of an application of the verse [not the absolute or only meaning of the verse].

(3) Regarding *And stop them; they shall be questioned* (37:24), *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:
It is said that this is in regard to *wilāyah* (allegiance) to ʿAlī. This is related from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī.

Author's comments: This has been related by al-Shaykh in his Amālī, with a chain of narration going back to Anas ibn Mālik, from the Prophet. In *ʿUyūn*, it is related from ʿAlī and al-Riḍā from the Prophet. In *Tafsir al-Qummī*, it is related from an Imām.

(4) In *al-Khiṣāl*, it is related from the Commander of the Faithful that the Prophet said:
On the day of resurrection, a person shall not continue forward until he is asked about four things: his life and how he used it, his youth and how he exhausted it, his wealth and how he spent it, and his love for us, Ahl al-Bayt.

Author's comments: Something similar has been related in *ʿIlal* from

him.

(5) In *Nahj al-Balāghah*, [Imām ʿAlī] says:
Be conscious of God with respect to [how you treat] His servants and lands, for you will be questioned even about small patches of land and beasts of burden.

(6) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related that Anas said:[1]
The Prophet said, "Whenever someone calls to a thing, he will be stopped on the day of resurrection, bound to it. It shall not leave him. And if a man called to another man [he will be bound to that man]."
Then the Prophet recited, "*And stop them; they shall be questioned*" (37:24).

(7) In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, it is related via a chain of narration from Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq al-Madanī from Imām al-Bāqir that the Prophet said regarding *For them is a known sustenance* (37:41):
The servants [of paradise] know of this sustenance and bring it to the friends (*awliyāʾ*) of God before they ask them to.
Regarding *fruits, and they shall be highly honored* (37:42), he said:
Whenever they desire something in the garden, it shall be bestowed upon them.

(8) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, in a narration from Abū al-Jārūd, it is related from Imām al-Bāqir regarding *then he will look and see him in the midst* (sawāʾ) *of hell* (37:55):
It means "in the midst (*wasaṭ*) of hell" [that is, *sawāʾ* means *wasaṭ*].

(9) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it related regarding *is it such that we will not die?* (37:58) from Imām al-Bāqir:[2]
When the people of paradise enter paradise, and the people of the fire enter the fire, death will be brought forward and slaughtered like a sheep between the garden and the fire. Then it will be said, "Eternal life! There shall be no more death." At that, the people

1 It is related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from al-Bukhārī in his *Tarīkh*, al-Tirmidhī, al-Dārimī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn Mardawayh from Anas.

2 It is related via a chain of narration from al-Qummī's father from ʿAlī ibn Mahziyār and al-Ḥasan ibn Maḥbūb from al-Naḍr ibn Suwayd from Durust from Abū Baṣīr from Imām al-Bāqir.

in paradise will say, "*Is it such that we will not die except for our first death, and we will not be punished? This is a great victory! For this, then, let those who would strive, strive.*" (37:58–61)

Author's comments: The account of death being slaughtered in the form of a sheep on the day of resurrection is something which is well-known and commonly narrated among both Shiʿis and Sunnis, and it is symbolic of eternal life on that day.

(10) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it says regarding the tree of Zaqqūm:

It is narrated that when the Quraysh heard this verse, they said, "We have never heard of this tree."

(11) Ibn al-Zibaʿrī says: "*Zaqqūm* in the Berber language means 'dates and cream'. It is related that it is the same in the language of Yemen. For that reason, Abū Jahl told his slave-girl: "O maid, *zaqmīna* (lit. 'bring us *zaqqūm*')," and the slave-girl brought him dates and cream. Then he told his companions, "Eat (*tazqimū*) of this which Muḥammad is frightening you with!"

Then he swore that the same fire that sprouted the tree would burn it, so God, the Exalted, sent down the verse, *We have made it a trial for the unjust* (37:63).

Author's comments: This meaning is related via several chains of narration.

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Verses 71–113

The previous verses refuted how they assigned partners to God and denied the signs of God, and threatened them with severe punishment. Following on from that, these verses assert that the majority of the ancients erred just as they [the contemporaries of the Prophet] err. Furthermore, the majority of the ancients denied the messengers just as they are denying the messengers. To bear witness to this, stories of yore are brought in such as the stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Elias (Ilyās), Lot, and Jonah. This particular set of verses alludes to parts of the story of Noah and summarizes the story of Abraham.

وَلَقَدْ ضَلَّ قَبْلَهُمْ أَكْثَرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٧١﴾ وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا فِيهِمْ مُنْذِرِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾
فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُنْذَرِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

(37:71–74) ***And, before them, most of the ancients went astray, although We sent warners*** **(mundhirīn)** ***among them. So see the end of those who were warned*** **(mundharīn)***—except for Allah's purified servants.*

This is in the context of warning the polytheists of this nation [that is, at the time of the Prophet, or among later Muslims] by urging them to reflect upon how those who came before them were obliterated. Most of the ancients went astray like these people [the Meccan polytheists] went astray. Messengers were sent to them to warn them just as a messenger [the Prophet] was sent to warn these people, but they called them liars. Thus, all of them were destroyed, apart from those who were purified and sincere.

The particle *la-* in *went astray* (la-qad ḍalla) is for swearing an oath. *La-* is used for the same reason in *We sent warners* (la-qad arsalnā). *Warners* (*mundhirīn*, with an *i*) means "messengers". *Mundharīn* with an *a* refers to the ancient peoples [who were warned].

Except for Allah's purified servants: The exception here can be taken one of two ways based on how one understands *Allah's purified servants*. If *Allah's purified servants* speaks of God's purified servants living among the various nations throughout history, then the exclusion is inclusive

[*muttasil*; that is, the servants are part of their respective peoples, but did not go astray]. If *Allah's purified servants* include the prophets as well, then the exclusion is exclusive [*munqaṭiʿ*; that is, it treats *Allah's purified servants* as a separate group] unless it is taken as an umbrella expression to include prophets in those who were not prophets [that is, via *taghlīb*]. In any case, the meaning is clear.

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وَلَقَدْ نَادَانَا نُوحٌ فَلَنِعْمَ الْمُجِيبُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

(37:75) *And Noah called upon Us* (wa laqad nādānā), *and how excellent are those who respond* (fa-la-niʿm al-mujībūn).

The particle *la-* in *laqad* and *la-niʿm* conveys an oath. It demonstrates the perfect care and attention given to Noah's call and God's response. God lauds Himself in responding, for the implied actor in *how excellent are those who respond* is "we" [meaning, "how excellent are We who respond"]. *Those who respond* is in the plural [*mujībin* instead of *mujīb*] to demonstrate [God's] greatness. These verses show that Noah's call here was his imprecation again his people and his plea to his Lord, as mentioned in:

> *And Noah said, "O Lord! Do not leave standing upon the earth a single house of these deniers."* (71:26)
> *And he [Noah] called out to his Lord, "I am overwhelmed. Help me!"* (54:10)

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وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ مِنَ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٦﴾

(37:76) *And We delivered him and his people* (ahlahu) *from the great calamity* (karb).

According to al-Rāghib, *karb* means "an intense sadness". Here, it speaks of the great flood or the way Noah's people harassed him. *Ahl* here includes his household as well as the people around him who believed. [This is reinforced by what] God says in Sūrah Hūd:

> *We said: Bring on board [the ship] two of each pair, and your people, except for those whom the decree has passed against, and whomever has believed.* (11:40)

Ahl can be used to refer either to a man's wife and children or to whoever has some sort of similarity or affiliation with that person.

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وَجَعَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُ هُمُ الْبَاقِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

(37:77) ***And We made his offspring endure.***

Meaning, they have continued to live among humankind even after Noah's era. We delved more into this concept in the exegesis on the story of Noah in Sūrah Hūd.

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وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾

(37:78) ***And We perpetuated [this blessing]*** **(taraknā)** ***among them in the later generations*** **(al-ākhirīn).**

Taraknā here means "making it last". *Al-ākhirīn* (lit. "the later ones") speaks of the bygone peoples who came after the first generations. This sentence recurs in this sūrah in the story of Abraham; in Sūrah al-Shuʿarāʾ, it says instead:

> *And ordain for me a goodly mention among later generations* (al-ākhirīn). (26:84)

Here, we have taken into consideration that the intent behind *a goodly mention* (lisān ṣidq) is that, after him, God would bring about someone who would uphold his mission and call people to his faith, the religion of divine unity.

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This is reinforced by the fact that the intent behind "perpetuating among the later generations" is God's reviving Noah's call to divine unity and his efforts in the way of God, era after era, generation after generation, until the Day of Resurrection.

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ نُوحٍ فِي الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

(37:79) ***Peace be upon Noah, throughout the worlds*** **(al-ʿālamīn)*!***

Here, by *the worlds* is meant all of them, because *al-ʿālamīn* is a generalized plural beginning with *al-*. Seemingly, *the worlds* refers to human "worlds"—that, is, how all peoples and nations will be gathered on the Day of Resurrection. God has gifted Noah this blessing before all human peoples, for no good belief or act can transpire among them without him having enacted it first, in his stance for calling to the oneness of God, refuting polytheism (*shirk*), carrying out the deeds that naturally follow from those, and suffering the severest trials. For almost a thousand years, he never associated anyone with God. Thus, he has a share in all good deeds enacted until the Day of Resurrection. Such an expansive blessing

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of peace is not found on anyone else in the Qur'an.

Some say that the intent behind *the worlds* (al-ʿālamīn) is the worlds of the angels and the twin creations of jinn and man.

إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

(37:80) ***Thus do We recompense the virtuous.***

This explains why these honors were bestowed upon him, such as responding to his call, saving him and his people from the great calamity, perpetuating his progeny among the later generations, and sending the benediction of peace upon him in all the worlds. His reward is likened to that of righteous people in general with respect to the basic principle of a goodly reward, not that they all have his reward. That is, it is not saying that all righteous people must necessarily share the same reward as him; this is clear.

إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

(37:81) ***He was one of Our faithful servants.***

This explains what it means for him to be righteous, as implied by the previous sentence. Namely, he is considered "righteous" because he was a true servant of God in the true sense of the word. He only wished or did anything if it was the will of God. He was one of the true faithful; he only held true beliefs, and these pervaded all aspects of his existence. When a person is like that, nothing will emanate from him other than handsome goodness; thus, he was one of the virtuous.

ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا الْآخَرِينَ ﴿٨٢﴾

(37:82) ***Then We drowned the others.***

Then (thumma) here indicates sequential actions rather than a lapse in time. *The others* (al-ākhirīn) speaks of his people who were polytheists.

وَإِنَّ مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ لَإِبْرَاهِيمَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(37:83) ***And Abraham was one of his followers*** **(inna min shīʿatihi la-ibrāhīm).**

A *shīʿah* is a group of people who follow someone other than

themselves, footstep by footstep. In short, any person who accepts to follow someone else's path is one of his *shīʿah*, even if that person lived before them or after them. God says:

> *And a barrier shall be placed between them and that which they desire, as was done with the likes of them (*bi-ashyāʿihim*) before: they are in a disquieting doubt.* (34:54)

The verses indicate that the pronoun *his* in *his followers* (min shīʿatihi) refers to Noah, meaning that Abraham was one of those who concorded with Noah on his religion; that is, the religion of divine unity. Some exegetes say that the pronoun *his* refers to Muḥammad, but there is no evidence for this from the text.

Some exegetes observe that there is a beautiful stylistic parallel between the stories of Noah and Abraham, which is conveyed by putting the story of Noah right before the story of Abraham. While Noah was a second Adam, the father of humanity, Abraham was the father of the prophets, for all their lines go back to him, and all of the surviving religions centred on divine unity—like the religions of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—are traced back to him. Also, God saved Noah from drowning and saved Abraham from burning.

إِذْ جَاءَ رَبَّهُ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ ﴿٨٤﴾

(37:84) ***When he came to his Lord with a sound heart.***

"Coming to his Lord" is a figure of speech indicating that he believed in Him and had faith in Him. This understanding is reinforced by the fact that the intent behind "soundness of heart" is that it is devoid of anything that would hinder its belief and faith in God (exalted be He)—such as associating partners with Him openly or secretly, unbecoming behavior, the effects of sins, or anything else that would incline a human being to other than God or interfere with purely turning to Him alone.

From this, it is clear that "a sound heart" is "that which does not incline towards anything other than God", as is said in hadith which will be discussed in the section on narrations, God willing.

Some exegetes say that "a sound heart" means "a heart free from associating others with God"; this meaning can essentially be seen in what we said initially. Some exegetes say that it means "a sorrowful heart", but this is as you can see [namely, that it is unsubstantiated].

The particle *idh* ("when") in this verse relates back to the expression

min shīʿatihi in the previous verse, and grammatical rules that could not be overlooked elsewhere could be overlooked in adverbs. Some say that it goes back to the implied word "remember (*idhkur*)".

إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَاذَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

(37:85) ***When he said to his father and people, "What are you worshipping?"***

Meaning, "What thing are you worshipping?" He asked them about what they were worshipping because he was astonished and amazed that they were worshipping idols.

أَئِفْكًا آلِهَةً دُونَ اللَّهِ تُرِيدُونَ ﴿٨٦﴾ فَمَا ظَنُّكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

(37:86–87) ***"False gods* (a-ifkan ālihatan)** ***other than Allah—is this what you desire? What is your idea about the Lord of the worlds?"***

Meaning, do you want false and invented gods, not God? *Ifk (*lie, falsehood*)* and *ālihah* (gods) are put at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis [even though, typically, they would follow the verb, not precede it].[1]

فَمَا ظَنُّكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾ فَنَظَرَ نَظْرَةً فِي النُّجُومِ ﴿٨٨﴾ فَقَالَ إِنِّي سَقِيمٌ ﴿٨٩﴾

(37:88–89) ***Then he glanced up at the stars, and said, "I feel ill."***

There is no doubt that these two verses—at least according to their straightforward meaning—link Abraham's feeling ill with his looking up at the stars. Possibly, it was because, through looking at the stars, he ascertained the time, like someone affected by a recurring fever who knows that it will return at a specific time or when a specific star rises or sets. Or, it may have had something specifically to do with the stars. It could also have had something to do with future events that astrologers had predicted via the stars. The Sabians gave heavy importance to this, and Abraham lived in the time of many Sabians.

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1 Note that the explanation of verse 87 is not given in the original text. We assume that the meaning is very clear. [Pub.]

This leads to two views:

(1) When the people of his city wanted to head out *en masse* to celebrate their festival, Abraham looked to the stars and then told them that his illness would soon recur; therefore, he could not go with them.

(2) When Abraham looked to the stars, he did so in the manner of astrologers and told the people that the stars indicated that he was about to fall ill; therefore, he could not go with them.

The first of these two views is more appropriate for Abraham. For Abraham stood at the pinnacle of belief in divine unity; he did not hold that anything other than God had any influence over events.

However, we do not have any solid evidence that he was *not* actually ill. The Qur'an—which is the divine word—says that he said he was ill, and that he came to his Lord with a sound heart, so it is inconceivable that he would lie or exaggerate.[1]

Exegetes have also put forward other views on these verses. The most apt of them is that when Abraham looked to the stars and told them he was ill, he was speaking evasively whereby he said something true but in such a manner that others would not understand what he really meant and instead think he was saying something else. Perhaps, for instance, he looked to the stars with the gaze of a monotheist beholding the divine creation and beheld how the divine creation evidences God's existence and oneness; however, the people assumed he was looking to the stars as an astrologer would to determine future events. Then, he said, "*I feel ill*," meaning what he would eventually fall ill sometime in his life, for no human being is ever free from illness; as Abraham says in the Qur'an, "*And when I am ill, He cures me*" (26:80). However, they took this to mean that he had an impending illness that would strike on the day they went out. Therefore, he would be able to stay back on that day and be alone in the city and carry out his plan to break their idols.

However, this view is based on the premise that he was healthy, not ill, on that day, whereas we have already mentioned that there is no evidence specifying that.

Also, it is not acceptable for prophets to speak evasively or deceptively

1 This is a tacit refutation of what is related in Sunni hadith; for instance, in *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* (vol. 4, book 55, no. 578), which says that Abraham only lied on three occasions, one of which was when he said he was sick.

because it would endanger people's trust in them.

فَتَوَلَّوْا عَنْهُ مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾

(37:90) ***They turned their backs on him.***

The plural pronoun *they* refers to Abraham's people. The singular pronoun *him* refers to Abraham. It means that they left their city without him.

فَرَاغَ إِلَىٰ آلِهَتِهِمْ فَقَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٩١﴾ مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنْطِقُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

(37:91–92) ***And so he went quietly*** **(rāgha)** ***to their gods and asked them, "Won't you eat? What is wrong with you—why don't you speak?"***

The verb *rāgha* means "inclining" or leaning towards something". Some say that it originally meant "leaning to one side to deceive someone".

"Won't you eat?": This reinforces what was has been said—that the polytheists served their idols food on their holidays.

"Won't you eat? What is wrong with you—why don't you speak?" He is speaking to the idols although they are inanimate objects, and he knows that they are not going to eat or speak. However, his outrage led him to treat them as if they were sentient beings, as the wrongdoers did, and to reprove them as if they were sentient beings.

He looks at them and sees that they have bodies shaped in such a form that they should eat, and that they have food, and so he is filled with anger and exclaims, "*Why don't you eat?*" When he does not hear a reply, he exclaims, "*What is wrong with you—why don't you speak?*" It is as if he says, "And you are the gods whose worshippers swear that you are sentient, able to look after their affairs," and when he does not hear a single peep back from them, he strikes them with his right hand.

فَرَاغَ عَلَيْهِمْ ضَرْبًا بِالْيَمِينِ ﴿٩٣﴾

(37:93) ***Then he turned upon them and struck them with his right hand.***

After speaking,[1] he leaned towards the idols and struck them [literally]

1 ᶜAllāmah's intent here is to say that the sequence of events (speaking->hitting) is indicated by the letter *fa-*, translated as "then". One of the interesting

with his right hand, or with a strong blow which [metaphorically] was as if it had the force of his right hand.

Some exegetes take "right hand" to mean "an oath", meaning that he struck them because of an oath he had previously taken, as mentioned in Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ: *By Allah, I shall plot against your idols* (21:57). However, this is farfetched.

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فَأَقْبَلُوا إِلَيْهِ يَزِفُّونَ ﴿٩٤﴾

(37:94) *So the people approached him, hastening* (yaziffūn).

Yaziffūn means "to walk quickly", meaning that they rushed to Abraham because of what had happened, and because they suspected him of doing it.

This sentence omits what happened previously: namely, they returned to their city and discovered what had been done to their idols, then suspected him, as is mentioned in Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ.

قَالَ أَتَعْبُدُونَ مَا تَنْحِتُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾ وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

(37:95–96) *He said, "Do you worship what you yourselves have hewn? And Allah has created you and what you craft."*

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Here, the narrative also skips some events—namely, that they captured Abraham and brought him before the people to question him [which is when he said this].

Abraham is asking a rhetorical question to criticize them. He is also presenting an argument for why their customs were baseless. He is saying, "It is not right for a person to hew something with his own hands and then worship it as his lord, while God, the Exalted, is the one who created the human being *and* what he fashions. The act of creation is inseparable from divine management and oversight. So He is the Lord of humankind, and it is foolish to abandon Him and worship these man-made idols instead."

This is clear because the pronoun *mā* in *what you yourselves have hewn* is a relative pronoun and refers to the thing they hew; there is a similar usage of *mā* in *what you craft*.[1] Some exegetes have allowed for

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characteristics of this exegesis is the meticulous attention given to the uses of the grammatical conjunction *fa-*. [Trans]

1 That is, it is a *mā mawṣūlah*, as opposed to other uses of *mā*, and there

the possibility that *mā* here actually introduces a gerund phrase, but this is deeply unlikely.

There is no harm in treating what human beings create as part of the creation of God, for God is the one who granted human beings free will to do this [even if human beings use their free will to create idols]. It does not mean that God is actually taking part in it; rather, here, God does not interfere with mankind's free will. Were this not the case, people would merely be predestined puppets.

If the intent here were to say that God created their actions directly, with no intermediary such as free will, then this would necessitate predestination. As a result, the verse would act as an excuse for them rather than as a criticism; it would be an argument for them, not against them.

قَالُوا ابْنُوا لَهُ بُنْيَانًا فَأَلْقُوهُ فِي الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٩٧﴾

(37:97) ***They said, "Build a structure*** **(bunyānan)** ***for him then cast him into the fire*** **(jaḥīm).***"*

Bunyān is a verbal noun from the word root *b-n-y* ("build") and means "something built". *Jaḥīm* is intensely burning fire.

فَأَرَادُوا بِهِ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنَاهُمُ الْأَسْفَلِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾

(37:98) ***They desired to scheme*** **(arādū kaydan)** ***against him, but We brought them low.***

Kayd is a plot. It means that they plotted to destroy him and burn him in the fire.

We brought them low portrays an image of how Abraham was above them, untouched by their plot. God says:

> *O fire! Be a source of coolness and safety for Abraham!* (21:69)

Thus, this chapter of the story of the life of Abraham closes with him standing up against idol-worship and arguing against the idol-worshippers. In the end, they cast him into the fire, but God makes their plot fail.

وَقَالَ إِنِّي ذَاهِبٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِ ﴿٩٩﴾

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is an implied pronoun at the end of *mā tanḥitūn*, as if it were saying *mā tanḥitūnahu*. [Trans.]

(37:99) ***He said, "I am going to my Lord; He will guide me."***

This begins a new chapter in the story of the life of Abraham. It tells of how he resolved to migrate away from his people and how he sought a righteous son from God. It tells of how God granted his request but then commanded him to sacrifice that son, and how a substitute sacrifice was sent down instead.

It is as if Abraham's words here are a fulfillment of the vow he made to Āzar [in Sūrah Maryam]:

> *And I will withdraw from you and what you call on besides Allah, and I will call upon my Lord; perchance I shall not remain unblessed in calling upon my Lord.* (19:48)

From this, it can be deduced that "going to his Lord" meant that he was going to a place dedicated to worshipping God and calling upon Him; namely, the Holy Land.

Some exegetes say that "going to his Lord" meant (a) "going to the place that my Lord ordered me to go", or (b) "dying"—that is, when he was cast into the fire and was about to die, he meant that his Lord would guide him to the garden. However, there is no evidence to support these views. Furthermore, these interpretations clash with the two sentences: "*My Lord, grant me one of the righteous [as a son], so We gave him glad tidings of a son* (37:100–101).

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

(37:100) ***"My Lord, grant me one of the righteous."***

This tells of how Abraham prayed for a child and specified that the child should be among the righteous.

فَبَشَّرْنَاهُ بِغُلَامٍ حَلِيمٍ ﴿١٠١﴾

(37:101) ***So We gave him glad tidings of a son* (ghulāman)** ***ready to endure and forebear.***

Meaning, We gave him the glad tidings, "I am going to grant you a son ready to endure and forebear"; this phrasing [that is, the use of the word *ghulām*] implies that the child would be male and would reach the threshold of manhood. In doing so, it shows that he had reached a level of maturity and inner purity—namely, the forbearance which God had

instilled in him—which showed when he said: "*My father, do as you are commanded; you will find me—if Allah wills—one of the patient*" (37:102).

The Qur'an does not describe any other prophets as "forbearing (*ḥalīm*)" except for him and his father. God says:

> "*Most surely Abraham was forbearing, tender-hearted, oft-returning [to Allah]*" (11:75).

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فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ السَّعْيَ قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ إِنِّي أَرَىٰ فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ فَانْظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَىٰ ۚ قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ ۖ سَتَجِدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

> (37:102) ***And when he reached the age of work, he said, "My son! I had a dream that I should sacrifice you; what do you think?" He said, "My father, do as you are commanded; you will find me—if Allah wills—one of the patient.***

The conjunction *fa-* [which opens the verse, here, translated as "and"] is a rhetorical device showing the passage of time and events which have been left unmentioned—for instance, that he was born, grew up, and reached the age of work. The "age of work" is the age whereby one can generally handle their own needs in life; namely, puberty. It means, "And when he was no longer a child, his father said to him, 'O my son….'"

He said, "My son! I had a dream that I should sacrifice you; what do you think?" This is Abraham's dream in which he sacrificed his son. His words *I see* indicate that this was a recurring dream, as in:

> *And the king said: I see seven fat cows which seven lean ones devoured, and seven green ears and [seven] others dry. O chiefs! Explain to me my dream, if you can interpret the dream.* (12:33)

What do you think (fa-unẓur mādhā tarā)?: Here, the verb *tarā* means "what do you think about what I said?" and "tell me your view about it" [rather than "seeing", which is the literal meaning]. This sentence shows that Abraham understood that his dream was a command from God to sacrifice his son; the dream portrayed the final result of the command [namely, the act of sacrifice]. For that reason, he sought his son's view about it and was testing him to see how he would respond.

He said, "My father, do as you are commanded": This is the response of his son. *Do as you are commanded* shows that he accepted being sacrificed

when it was a divine command. He says "do as you are commanded" not "sacrifice me" to show that his father was commanded and that a divine command must be obeyed.

"You will find me—if Allah wills—one of the patient": He says this to gladden the spirit of his father so that his father would not be distressed or pained upon seeing his son drenched in blood. These words convey an even loftier aspect of his inner refinement, for he makes his promise contingent on God granting him patience. This shows that he understands that he does not own or control this trait himself; rather, it is a gift from God, who may grant or deny it as He wills.

فَلَمَّا أَسْلَمَا وَتَلَّهُ لِلْجَبِينِ ﴿١٠٣﴾

(37:103) ***So when they had both submitted*** **(aslamā)** ***and he had flung him down upon his forehead*** **(tallahu lil-jabīn).**

Aslamā here means "being content with" and "surrendering". *Talla* means "to throw down", and the *jabīn* is one of the two sides of the forehead. *Jabīn* is prefixed by the preposition *li-* to indicate that it shows what he fell upon when he was thrown down. It is similar in usage to the verse:

*And they fall on their faces (*lil-adhqān*) in prostration* (17:107).

It means, "When Abraham and his son had surrendered to the divine command and were content with it, and Abraham threw him down on his forehead." What happens after "when" is omitted to signify the severity of the distress and the bitterness of the experience.[1]

وَنَادَيْنَاهُ أَنْ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ ﴿١٠٤﴾ قَدْ صَدَّقْتَ الرُّؤْيَا ۚ إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي
الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٠٥﴾ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ الْبَلَاءُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٠٦﴾

(37:104–106) ***And We called out to him, "O Abraham! You have fulfilled the vision!" Thus*** **(ka-dhālik)** ***do We reward the virtuous. This*** **(hādhā)** ***is a manifest trial.***

This is appended to the resulting clause (after "when") that is omitted.

You have fulfilled the vision means "you have handled it truthfully and sincerely, and carried out the order which We gave you in order to test

1 That is, the verses are structured along the lines of "when Abraham did that, something unspeakable happened, and God called out…." [Trans.]

you. You have honored this command sufficiently."

The pronouns *ka-dhālik* [here, rendered "thus"] and *hādhā* (this) refer to the story of the sacrifice of Abraham's son—how it was a bitter test and dire trial. *Hādhā* (this) also indicates the severity of the matter.

It means, "This is the way in which We reward the righteous. We try them with that tests that appear to be severe but are easy in reality. When they have passed these tests, We reward them with the best reward in this world and in the hereafter. This is because We tried Abraham with a clear test."

وَفَدَيْنَاهُ بِذِبْحٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٠٧﴾

(37:107) ***And We ransomed him with a tremendous sacrifice.***

Meaning, "We freed his son in exchange for a tremendous sacrifice." According to narrations, this ransom was a sheep which Gabriel (Jibraʾīl) brought from the divine environs. The ransom is described as "tremendous" because it came from God; God is the one who provided the ransom.

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

(37:108) ***And we kept his praise alive among later generations.***

This has already been discussed in this exegesis.

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

(37:109) ***Peace*** **(salāmun)** ***be upon Abraham.***

This is a divine salutation upon him. *Peace* is in the indefinite form to express its magnitude.

كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١١٠﴾ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١١١﴾

(37:110–111) ***Thus do We reward the virtuous. He was one of Our faithful servants.***

These two verses have already been explained.

وَبَشَّرْنَاهُ بِإِسْحَاقَ نَبِيًّا مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١١٢﴾

(37:112) ***And We gave him glad tidings of Isaac, a prophet and one***

of the righteous.

The pronoun *him* refers to Abraham.

Behold how this verse overflows with glad tidings of [the birth of] Isaac, and how it comes after the previous delivery of glad tidings (*And We gave him glad tidings of a son ready to endure and forebear*, 37:101, followed by *And when he reached the age of work* [37:102] and the rest of the story).

It is clear from this that the son whom Abraham was ordered to sacrifice was not Isaac; rather, it was Ishmael. We discussed this in our discussion of the story of Abraham in Sūrah al-Anʿām.[1]

وَبَارَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَىٰ إِسْحَاقَ ۚ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا مُحْسِنٌ وَظَالِمٌ لِنَفْسِهِ مُبِينٌ ﴿١١٣﴾

(37:113) ***And We blessed him*** **(bāraknā ʿalayhi)** ***and Isaac. And from his progeny are the virtuous and those who clearly wrong themselves.***

Bāraka ʿalā means "to make something good, fruitful, and lasting". Here, it means, "We made what We gave Abraham and Isaac good, lasting, and fruitful."

Possibly, *We blessed* is in the context of *and from his progeny are the virtuous and those who clearly wrong themselves*—meaning "granting the blessing of multiplying his children and Isaac's children". The rest of the verse is clear.

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says regarding "a sound heart" (37:84):
A "sound heart" (*qalb salīm*) is one which encounters God, the Mighty and Glorious, with nothing in it but Him.
It also says:

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1 This comment from ʿAllāmah may seem redundant today since Muslims unanimously (or near-unanimously) hold that the son whom Abraham was ordered to sacrifice was Ishmael. However, apart from the fact that, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is Isaac, the reality is that the Qur'an does not specify the name of the son who was to be sacrificed. For this, narrations must be consulted. While the majority of narrations do identify this son as Ishmael, a minority (probably inauthentic narrations drawing on the Judaeo-Christian tradition) identify him as Isaac; hence, there is value to this discussion. For more information, see ʿAllāmah's discussion of the matter. [Trans.]

A "sound heart" is one free of doubt.

(2) In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, it is related via a chain of narration from Ḥujr that Imām al-Ṣādiq said that Imām al-Bāqir said:
He disgraced their gods, then *glanced up towards the stars and said, "I feel ill"* (37:88–89). By God, he was not ill, nor did he lie.

Author's comment: Other narrations with the same meaning—that is, that Abraham neither lied nor was ill—have been related, meaning that he was sick of the local religion and rejected it. [That is, he felt unwell on the inside.]

Narrations telling of the arguments that Abraham put forward to his people, his breaking of the idols, and his being thrown in the fire were mentioned in the sections of this exegesis on Sūrah al-Anʿām, Sūrah Maryam, Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ, and Sūrah al-Shuʿarāʾ.

(3) In *al-Tawḥīd* [by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq], it is related in a narration:
A man asked the Commander of the Faithful about the allegorical or ambiguous (*mutashabih*) verses of the Qurʾan.[1]
He [Imām ʿAlī] said, "Have I not told you that sometimes the outer meaning (*tanzīl*) of a thing in the book of God—the Mighty and Glorious—differs from its inner meaning (*taʾwīl*). It is not like human speech. I shall tell you a bit about this that shall suffice, God willing.
An example is what Abraham said: "*I am going to my Lord; He will guide me*" (37:99). "Going to his Lord" meant "turning to Him in worship, striving [in His way], and coming near to God, the Mighty and Glorious". Do you not see that the inner meaning differs from the outer meaning?

(4) In *al-Tawḥīd* [by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq], it is related with a chain of narration from al-Fatḥ ibn Yazīd al-Jurjānī from Imām Riḍā:
He [Imām al-Riḍā] said: "O Fatḥ, God has two forms of will (*irādah*) and two forms of volition (*mashīʾah*): an irrevocable will (*irādah ḥatm*) and a divine intent (*irādah ʿazm*). Sometimes He may forbid something but intend it to happen, or command something but intend it not to happen.
"Have you not seen that He forbade Adam and his wife from

1 Referring to Qurʾan 3:7: *He is the one who sent down to you the book. It has verses that are clear* (muḥkam) *that are the basis of the Book, and others which are allegorical or ambiguous* (mutashābih)….

eating from the tree but actually intended for them to eat from it? Had He not intended that, they would not have eaten from it; if He had not intended it and they had eaten from it, their cravings would have gotten the best of God's will.

"And He commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael but intended that Abraham not sacrifice him. Had He not willed that Abraham not sacrifice him, Abraham's will would have overpowered God's, the Mighty and Glorious."

I said: "You have gladdened me; may God gladden you."

(5) In the *Amālī* of al-Shaykh [al-Ṭūsī], it is related with a chain of narration leading to Sulaymān ibn Yazīd:

ᶜAlī ibn Mūsā [Imām al-Riḍā] told us: "My father related from his father from Imām al-Bāqir from his father from his forefathers who said, 'The sacrifice was Ishmael.'"

Author's comments: A similar thing has been related in *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān* from Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq. Many other narrations with this meaning have been related from the Imāms of Ahl al-Bayt. While some narrations say it was Isaac, they are discarded because they contradict the Qur'an.

(6) It is related in *Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*: Imām al-Ṣādiq was asked who was sacrificed.

He said, "Ishmael, because God tells his story in His book, *then* says: '*And We gave him glad tidings of Isaac, a prophet and one of the righteous*'" (37:112).

Author's comments: This is what was mentioned in the explanation of the verse—that the sequence of the verses clearly indicates that it was Ishmael.

(7) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, it is related from Ibn Isḥāq:

When Abraham used to visit Ishmael and Hājar, he was borne upon the Burāq.[1] He would leave Shām in the morning and be in Mecca by the afternoon. Then, he would leave Mecca in the evening and spend the night back in Shām.[2]

This continued until Ishmael matured, and Abraham had a dream that he was sacrificing him. He said to him, "O my son, take this

1 The winged horse that is said to have carried the Prophet Muḥammad on his night ascension to the heavenly realms. [Trans.]

2 Syria, the Levant, and its environs. [Trans.]

rope and this knife, then come with me to this ravine to collect firewood."

When Abraham was alone with his son in the ravine [in the] Thabīr [mountains], he told him what God had conveyed to him. Ishmael said, "O my father, tie my bonds tight so that I do not quaver, and keep your outer robe away from me so that my blood will not splatter on it, lest my mother see it. Sharpen your blade, and hasten the cut of your knife along my throat so that it will be easier for me, for death is a heavy thing."

Abraham said to him, "You are the best helper, O my son, with what God has commanded."

Ibn Isḥāq continues the story until he reaches this point, where he says:

Abraham had bent over him with the knife, when Jibraʾīl deflected the knife, brought a sheep from the Thabīr [mountains], pushed Ishmael aside, and put the sheep in place of the boy. A call rang out from the left side of the Khayf Mosque: "*O Abraham! You have fulfilled the vision!*" (37:104–105).

Author's comments: There are many narrations telling this story, although there are some contradictions between them.

(8) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is related from al-ʿAyyāshī via a chain of narration from Burayd ibn Muʿāwiyah al-ʿIjlī that Burayd said:

I asked Imām al-Ṣādiq, "How much time passed between the glad tidings Abraham received of Ishmael and Isaac?"

He [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said, "Five years passed between the two announcements of glad tidings. God, the Exalted, says, '*So We gave him glad tidings of a son ready to endure and forebear*' (37:101), meaning Ishmael; he was the first son whom Abraham received glad tidings of from God."

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Verses 114–132

This section summarizes the story of Moses and Aaron, and alludes to the story of Elias (Ilyās). It explains how God blessed them and the punishment accorded to those who belied them. In this section, God's mercy and glad tidings exceed His warnings and wrath.

وَلَقَدْ مَنَنَّا عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ ﴿١١٤﴾

(37:114) ***And We were gracious*** **(manannā)** ***to Moses and Aaron.***

The verb *manannā* means "to bless". Possibly, here, it specifically refers to the ways that God blessed Moses, Aaron, and his people which are mentioned in the next few verses, such as saving them [from the Pharaoh], offering divine assistance, giving them a divinely revealed book, and guidance. In this case, the verses *And We saved them both and their people from the great calamity* (37:115) would be appended to this verse via the conjunction *and* to demonstrate that these verses explain what these blessings are.

وَنَجَّيْنَاهُمَا وَقَوْمَهُمَا مِنَ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿١١٥﴾

(37:115) ***And We saved them both*** **(najjaynāhummā)** ***and their people from the great calamity.***

This [*the great calamity*] was the severe distress that befell them when the Pharaoh weakened them, punished them terribly, and slew their boy-children while keeping the girls alive.

وَنَصَرْنَاهُمْ فَكَانُوا هُمُ الْغَالِبِينَ ﴿١١٦﴾

(37:116) ***And We helped them*** **(wa naṣarnāhum)**, ***so they were victorious.***

This is what paved the way for their escape from Egypt, their crossing the Read Sea, and destruction of Pharaoh and his forces.

Some hold the mistaken notion that divine assistance (*naṣr*, as in the verb *naṣarnāhum*) should have been mentioned *before* being saved, since being saved depends on divine assistance. However, this view is wrong,

because the expression "divine assistance (*naṣr*)" is used for someone [such as a warrior] who has some power or strength but needs a boost in order to be victorious. After the Israelites left Egypt, they had some strength but still were in need of divine assistance; therefore, the expression "divine assistance" is used for the time after they left Egypt. However, the expression "saving someone" is used when someone has no power of their own; and, before they left Egypt, the Israelites were enslaved prisoners, completely powerless. That is why it first describes them as being "saved" (*najjaynāhummā*) from Egypt and then as "divinely assisted".

وَآتَيْنَاهُمَا الْكِتَابَ الْمُسْتَبِينَ ﴿١١٧﴾

(37:117) And We gave them the Book that makes [things] clear.

Meaning that it makes clear the hidden things that they were unaware of; this is what people need in this life and in the hereafter.

وَهَدَيْنَاهُمَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿١١٨﴾

(37:118) ***And We guided them both on the straight path.***

"Guidance" is used here in the full sense of the word. For that reason, it is used with respect to both of then [Moses and Aaron] and does not include their people. The meaning of "guidance to the straight path" was discussed previously in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Fātiḥah.

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِمَا فِي الْآخِرِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾ سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ ﴿١٢٠﴾ إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٢١﴾ إِنَّهُمَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

(37:119–122) ***And We kept them [their memory, their praise, Our blessings upon them] alive among the later generations. Peace be upon Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the virtuous. They were among Our faithful servants.***

These verses have already been explained.

وَإِنَّ إِلْيَاسَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

(37:123) ***And Elias (Ilyās) was one of the messengers.***

Exegetes say that Elias was from the family of Aaron and was appointed

as a prophet for Baalbek.[1] However, there is no evidence for this [in the verses].

إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٢٤﴾ أَتَدْعُونَ بَعْلًا وَتَذَرُونَ أَحْسَنَ الْخَالِقِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾ اللَّهَ رَبَّكُمْ وَرَبَّ آبَائِكُمُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٢٦﴾

(37:124–126) ***When he said to his people, "Will you not be mindful [of Allah, or of evil]? You call upon Baal and forsake the best of creators, [while] Allah is your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of old!"***

This is part of his call to his people to invite them to the unity of God and to reprimand them for worshipping Baal (one of their idols) in lieu of God.

While he is criticizing them, his words also contain a clear proof for the unity of God. When he says *[you] forsake the best of creators, [while] Allah is your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of old*, he is firstly censuring them for abandoning the worship of the best of creators. However, the creation and origination of things are imbued in their essences as well as the order which flows through all creation and which is known as "divine management". So just as God created things, He looks after them; He is the manager of all He created. He points to this when he says *Allah is your Lord* after describing God as the *best of creators.*

Then he points to the lordship of God. God's lordship is not limited to specific groups of people, unlike the idols, in that each group of people had their own idol which they took as a lord. God is both their Lord and the Lord of their first forefathers; he is the creator and maintainer of all. He points to this when he says *Allah is your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of old*.

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ ﴿١٢٧﴾

(37:127) ***But they denied him; therefore, they shall be arraigned* (muḥḍarūn).**

1 Possibly, they adopted this view because it is said that Baalbak was known for having a temple of Baal, and Elias censures the people for their worship of Baal. [Trans.]

Meaning, they shall be resurrected to be brought forward for punishment. Previously, it was explained that *muḥdarūn* has the connotation of summoning someone to something dreadful.

إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿١٢٨﴾

(37:128) ***Except for Allah's purified servants.***

This shows that there were a number of *Allah's purified servants* among his people.

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ ﴿١٢٩﴾ سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِلْ يَاسِينَ ﴿١٣٠﴾ إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٣١﴾ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣٢﴾

(37:129–132) ***And We kept them [their memory, their praise, Our blessings upon them] alive among the later generations. Peace be upon Elias*** **(Il Yāsīn).** ***Thus do We reward the virtuous. He was one of Our faithful servants.***

Similar verses have already been explained.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding *you call upon Baal?* (37:125), it says: They had an idol whom they called Baal.

(2) In *Maʿānī* [*al-Akhbār*], with a chain of narration to Qādiḥ from Imam al-Ṣādiq, from his father, from his forefathers, from ʿAlī, it says regarding *Peace be upon Elias* (Il Yāsīn) (37:130):
Yāsīn is Muḥammad, and we are Āl Yāsīn (the family of Yāsīn).

Author's comments: A similar narration is related in *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā* from Imam Riḍā. This interpretation is based on reading the verse as *Āl Yāsīn* [instead of *Il Yāsīn*], as reflected in the readings of Nāfiʿ, Ibn ʿĀmir, Yaʿqūb, and Zayd.

Some Words on the Story of Elias (Ilyās)

1. His Story in the Qur'an

The Qur'an only mentions his name in two places—here and in Sūrah al-Anʿām, when it is speaking of the guidance of the prophets:

And Zakariyā and Yaḥyā and ʿĪsā and Ilyās: all among the virtuous

(6:85).

In this chapter, God does not mention any of his story except to say that he called his people to worship God and that they were worshipping Baal. A group of his people believed in him and had sincere faith, whereas the others called him a liar. The latter formed the majority of his people, who will be summoned forth for judgment.

God praises him in Sūrah al-Anʿām along with all the other prophets, and, here, along with God's virtuous, faithful servants. According to the most commonly adopted recitation, He greets him with the divine blessing of peace: *Peace be upon Elias* (Il Yāsīn) (37:13).

2. Narrations About Him

As with most of the stories of the prophets, there are varying, conflicting narrations about him. Some of the most astonishing ones are:

(1) It is related from Ibn Masʿūd that Elias was actually Idrīs.

(2) It is related from Ibn ʿAbbās from the Prophet that Elias was actually al-Khiḍr.

(3) It is related from Wahab, Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, and others that Elias has eternal life and will not die until the blowing of the trumpet [at the end of the world].

(4) It is related from Wahab that Elias besought God to relieve him of his people, and so God sent him a mount in the form of a horse the color of fire. Elias hopped on it, and it bore him away. God clad him in feathers and light and made him lose interest in food and drink. Thus, he abided among the angels.

(5) It is related from Kaʿb al-Aḥbār that Elias governed mountains and lands, and he was actually the one whom God calls Dhū al-Nūn [in the Qur'an].

(6) It is related from al-Ḥasan that Elias was entrusted with the deserts, and al-Khiḍr was entrusted with the mountains.

(7) It is related from Anas: "Elias met the Prophet on one of his travels. They sat together and talked; then, a table-spread from the heavens was sent down, and they ate and fed me [Anas]. Then, he bade farewell to him and bade farewell to me, and I saw him travel up into the clouds in the sky."

There are similar narrations as well.[1]

1 This is mentioned in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* in explanation of the story alluded

Some Shiʿi narrations also ascribe eternal life to him.[1] However, they are weak, and are unsupported by what the verses actually say.

(8) In *Biḥār al-Anwār*, there is a narration about the story of Elias taken from the book *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* related from [al-Shaykh] al-Ṣadūq via of a chain of narration ending in Wahab ibn Munabbih. Al-Thaʿlabī also relates it in his *al-ʿArāʾis* from Ibn Isḥāq and other scholars of hadith who popularized it. The narration is quite long; in summary, it says:

After the territory of the Israelites was split apart, some of them migrated to Baalbek. They had a king who used to worship an idol called Baal, and he also used to make the people worship it as well. This king had a wanton wife who had married seven kings before him and had given birth to ninety children—and that did not even include her grandchildren. Whenever the king went away, he set her in his place in his stead to judge between the people.

He had a faithful, wise scribe who had rescued from her grasp three hundred of the faithful whom she wanted dead. Near the castle, there lived a believing man who had an orchard. The king used to respect him greatly and honor him. However, once, when the king was gone, she killed this believing neighbor and seized his orchard.

When the king returned and learned what had happened, he censured her. She apologized and mollified him, and it fell upon God to take vengeance for the victim, unless the king and his wife repented.

So God sent Elias to them to call them to the worship of God, and to inform them of what had now fallen to God to do. Infuriated, they swore to torture and kill him, so he fled to the harshest mountain there and remained atop it for seven years, living on the herbs of the land and fruits of the trees.

Then, God caused one of the king's sons to fall ill. The king loved this son enormously, and he beseeched Baal to cure him, but it was to no avail. Someone said to him, "He is angry at you for not killing Elias."

So the king sent some of his people to deceive Elias and capture

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to in these verses.

1 In *Biḥār al-Anwār*, this is related from the book *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*.

him, but God sent them a fire that burned them. Then the king sent a contingent of stout warriors, as well as his believing scribe, and Elias went with the scribe to protect him from the king's anger. However, in the meantime, God caused the king's son to die, and the king was so overwhelmed with grief that he forgot Elias. Therefore, Elias returned unscathed.

Then, after a long time had passed, Elias left the mountain and sought refuge in the house of the mother of Yūnus ibn Mattā (Prophet Jonah). At that time, Jonah was still a suckling boy. Then, after six months, Elias went back to the mountain.

As it happened, Jonah died afterwards; however, God brought Jonah back to life at the bequest of Elias. This was after Jonah' mother went in search of Elias and found him and pleaded to him [to do this].

Then he asked God to take vengeance on behalf of the Israelites and to withhold rain from them. And so God afflicted them with a drought, and, for years, they struggled and regretted what they had done, and came to him, repented, and proclaimed their faith. So he asked God to send rain to them, and God granted them rain and brought the lands back to life. They complained to him about the destruction of their walls and about how they did not have any seeds to grow crops from, so God revealed to him that he should tell them to sow grains of salt and sand. From the salt, chickpeas grew; from the sand, grain sprouted.

Then, once God had relived them of their difficulty, they broke their word and reverted to their vilest deeds. Elias tired of that and asked God to relive him of his people, so God sent him a horse of fire. Elias hopped onto it, and it carried him up into the heavens, whereupon God clad him in feathers and light, and he abided among the angels.

Then God set an enemy upon the king and his wife who sought them out, defeated them, killed them, and tossed their corpses into the orchard of the faithful man whom they had killed and whose orchard they had seized.

Upon contemplating this account, you will be left with no doubt that it is weak.

Verses 133–148

These verses summarize the story of Lot (Lūṭ) and Jonah (Yūnus), and tell of how God tried Jonah with the whale because he turned away from his people when the punishment was lifted from them after it had neared.

وَإِنَّ لُوطًا لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٣٣﴾ إِذْ نَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

(37:133–134) ***And Lot was among the messengers. Behold, We saved him and all of his family [or followers].***

God saved him and his family from the punishment that was to befall his people—namely, being swallowed up by the earth, the raining down of stones and shale, and the other things that God has mentioned in the Qur'an.

إِلَّا عَجُوزًا فِي الْغَابِرِينَ ﴿١٣٥﴾

(37:135) ***Except an old woman who lagged behind.***

Meaning, that she remained when the punishment rained down, and this was the wife of Lot.

ثُمَّ دَمَّرْنَا الْآخَرِينَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

(37:136) ***Then We destroyed*** **(dammarnā)** ***the others.***

Dammarnā means "destroyed". The *others* are his people whom he was sent to.

وَإِنَّكُمْ لَتَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مُصْبِحِينَ ﴿١٣٧﴾ وَبِاللَّيْلِ ۗ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

(37:137–138) ***And you pass by them in the morning and at night. Do you not understand?***

The ruins of their civilization were on the route from the Hijaz to Syria. Here, "passing by them" means passing by their ruined homes. Today, it is said that they are hidden underwater.

وَإِنَّ يُونُسَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾ إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى الْفُلْكِ الْمَشْحُونِ ﴿١٤٠﴾

(37:139–140) ***And Jonah was one of the messengers. Behold, he fled*** **(abaqa)** ***to the laden ship.***

Meaning, the ship was laden with people. The verb *abaqa* is used for a slave fleeing his master.

Here, the verb *abaqa* implies that he left and turned away from his people. He did not disobey his Lord when he left them since his Lord had not forbidden him from doing so; however, it was similar to how a slave might flee is master, and so God took him to task for that. This has been discussed previously in the exegesis of the verse:

> *And Dhū al-Nūn* [Jonah]*, when he went away in wrath, and imagined that We had no power over him…* (21:87).

فَسَاهَمَ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمُدْحَضِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾

(37:141) ***And cast lots*** **(sāhama)***,* ***and was one of those who were cast off*** **(mudḥaḍīn).**

Sāhama means "drawing lots". *Mudḥaḍ* is the passive participle of the root for "winning"—meaning that he lost.[1] A whale [or other giant fish] had come up to the ship, and the sailors were compelled to throw one of their own overboard into the sea for it to eat, so that it would leave the ship alone. They cast lots, and the lot fell to Jonah.

فَالْتَقَمَهُ الْحُوتُ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ ﴿١٤٢﴾

(37:142) ***So the fish swallowed him*** **(altaqamahu)** ***while he was blameworthy*** **(mulīm).**

The verb *altaqama* means "swallow". *Mulīm* is from the verb root *a-l-m* and means "entering the state of being blamed", similar grammatically to how the verb *aḥrama* means "to enter the state of what is forbidden (*iḥrām*)"; or else it means "he was reprimanded".

فَلَوْلَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ ﴿١٤٣﴾ لَلَبِثَ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

1 Literally, one could say that he was vanquished. [Trans.]

(37:143–144) ***Had he not been among those who glorify [Allah], he would have tarried in its belly until the day when they are raised.***

This includes him in the group of those who glorified [God]. They are those who repeatedly glorified God until it became an established characteristic, perpetually permeating their being. Therefore, this phrase shows that he must have engaged in the glorification of God for a long time.

There are three views on when he glorified God:

Some exegetes say that he became one of those who glorified God before he was swallowed by the whale.

Others say that he became one of those who glorify God while he was in the belly of the whale.

Others say that he was one of those who glorified God both before he was swallowed by the whale, and when he was inside the whale.

In Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ, God speaks of his glorification:

> *He called out in the darkness, "There is no god but You. Glory be to You! I was wrong."* (21:87)

This verse shows that he was either (a) one of those who glorified God while he was in the belly of the whale, and only then, or (b) one of those who glorified God both while he was in the belly of the whale, and beforehand. The other view—that the verse means that he glorified God before he was in the whale—does not fit with this verse.

However, since he combines his glorification of God with his admission that he had done wrong and what he had felt—namely, that God did not have power over him when he left his people—this, together with the verse (*Had he not been among those who glorify Allah*), indicates that it was in fact his glorification which led him to be rescued. Therefore, God tried him with this so that he would be purified and consequently be saved from the sorrow he had brought upon himself through what he had done.

From this, it is clear that the focus of the text is on his glorification while he was inside the whale, and so the third view—which takes a middle ground—is best.

The verse indicates that the intent behind his glorification here is his calling out in the darkness *there is no Allah but you! I was wrong* (21:87). *There is no god but Allah* comes first as a clear reason for his glorification. It is as if he is saying, "There is nothing truly worthy of worship or turning to other than You. You are above what might have been implied by my deed. I was fleeing from you, turning away from serving You and turning

to other than You. I wronged my self! I turn now to You and absolve myself of how my deed could have been construed as turning towards someone other than You."

This is the meaning of his glorification. Were it not for that, he would not have ever been saved, for the reason for him being saved is tied to his glorification and professing the heights of divinity of God, as was mentioned.

From this, it is apparent that *he would have tarried in its belly until they day they are raised* shows that he would have remained perpetually in the belly of the whale until the resurrection, at which time he would have been raised from it like others are raised from their graves, as God speaks of in:

> *From it [the earth], We created them, and to it we return them, and from it we raise them up again*. (20:55)

There is no evidence in the verse to indicate whether he would have had to remain alive or dead (with the belly of the whale as his grave) in the belly of the whale until the day of resurrection, or whether the whale would have had to have lived forever, or some other arrangement. There are no grounds for the exegetical debates over whether he would have remained alive or dead, whether its belly would have been his grave, or whether *the day they are raised* refers to the first blow of the trumpet (upon which all created beings perish) or the second blow of the trumpet, or whether it is simply a metaphor for a very long time.

فَنَبَذْنَاهُ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ ﴿١٤٥﴾

(37:145) ***Then We cast him*** **(fa-nabadhnāhu)** ***onto the barren shore*** **(bil-ʿarāʾ)** ***while he was ill***

The verb *nabadha* means "to throw, throw away, or discard something". *ʿArāʾ* is a place where there is no shelter to take shade under such as a roof, tent, or tree.

According to the apparent meaning of the verses, it means that after he became one of those who glorified God, God cast him out of the belly of the whale, out of the water and onto a shadeless land while he was ill.

وَأَنْبَتْنَا عَلَيْهِ شَجَرَةً مِنْ يَقْطِينٍ ﴿١٤٦﴾

(37:146) ***And caused a gourd-tree*** **(yaqṭīn)** ***to grow over him.***

Yaqṭīn is a type of squash plant with broad, round leaves. God caused it to grow so that he could take shelter under its leaves.

وَأَرْسَلْنَاهُ إِلَىٰ مِائَةِ أَلْفٍ أَوْ يَزِيدُونَ ﴿١٤٧﴾

(37:147) ***And We sent him a hundred thousand or more.***

Or here does not imply uncertainty [since God is not unaware of how many people there were], but rather denotes plentitude, as if to say *a hundred thousand—nay, more*. Here it is speaking of the people of Nineveh.

فَآمَنُوا فَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿١٤٨﴾

(37:148) ***And they believed, so we gave them provision [or enjoyment] for a while.***

Meaning that since they believed in Jonah and did not deem him a liar, God averted the punishment from them that had been approaching and instead let them carry on until their appointed lifespans had come to an end.

The verse indicates that the punishment was averted from them. Being "granted provision" alludes to this verse:

> *Why has not a single town believed and benefitted from its belief, other than the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and We granted them provision [or enjoyment] for a while.* (10:98)

This and the above verses show that Jonah was sent back to the same people whom he had left, not a new people, and that they believed in him and followed him after they had faith and repented when they saw the punishment looming.

Some exegetes hold that *We sent him* (37:147) implies that he was sent to a new people after he was expelled from the whale. However, this view is weak. Rather, first, he went to the people of Nineveh, who were worshipping idols, and called them to the worship of God. However, that was too much for them, and he left, wandering the earth, in hopes that God would absolve him of this responsibility. He set sail, and God tried him with the whale; then he was cast onto the barren shore. After that, he responded to the call of God, obeyed, and called them to the worship of God; this time, they answered his call, and so God averted from them the punishment He had threatened them with if they did not believe.

This is because—as you have seen—the context show that he was sent again, and they believed again, after having repented, and that their being granted respite was contingent on their belief in him, not upon the lifting of the punishment from them. For it would not befit God to leave them to themselves, had they not believed in His messenger again and turned to Him in his absence. Understand that!

Furthermore, the following verses clash with that [weak] exegetical view:

> *And Dhū al-Nūn [Jonah], when he went away in wrath….* (21:87)
> *And be not like the one in the fish, when he called out in distress….* (68:48)
> *Why has not a single town believed and benefitted from its belief, other than the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them (*kashafnā*) the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and We granted them provision [or enjoyment] for a while.* (10:98)

For punishment can only be described as "averted" (*kashafnā*) when it is already present or impending.

Some Words on the Story of Jonah (Yūnus)

1. His Story in the Qur'an

The Qur'an only mentions a segment of his story and the story of his people. In Sūrah al-Ṣaffāt, it speaks of him being sent, running away, boarding the ship, and being swallowed by the whale; then it speaks of how he was saved and sent again to his people, who then believed:

> *And Jonah was one of the messengers. Behold, he fled to the laden ship and cast lots, and was one of those who were cast off. So the fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy. Had he not been among those who glorify [Allah], he would have tarried in its belly until the day when they are raised. Then We cast him onto the barren shore while he was ill, and caused a gourd-tree to grow over him. And We sent him a hundred thousand or more, and they believed, so we gave them provision [or enjoyment] for a while.* (37:139–148)

Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ tells of his glorification inside the belly of the whale, and his being saved:

> *And Dhū al-Nūn [Jonah], when he went away in wrath, and imagined that We had no power over him. He called out in the darkness,*

> *"There is no god but You. Glory be to You! I was wrong." So We responded to him and delivered him from grief, and thus do We deliver the believers.* (21:87–88)

And Sūrah Nūn tells of how he called out in distress, how he was expelled from the whale, and how he was chosen by God:

> *So patiently await the judgment of your Lord, and be not like the one in the fish, when he called out in distress. Were it not that favor from his Lord had overtaken him, he would certainly have been cast out onto the barren shore, disgraced. Then his Lord chose him and made him one of the virtuous.* (68:48–50)

Then Sūrah Yūnus tells of how his people believed, and how the punishment was averted from them:

> *Why has not a single town believed and benefitted from its belief, other than the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and We granted them provision [or enjoyment] for a while.* (10:98)

In short, what can be deduced from these verses as a whole (as well as from other nearby indications in the text), is that Jonah was one of the messengers whom God sent to his people. They were many in number, over a hundred thousand. He called them [to God] but they denied him and rejected him in return. This continued until the punishment—which he had warned them of—approached, and he left them.

When the punishment approached and they saw it with their own eyes, they decided to believe and turn to God. Therefore, God averted the humbling punishment from them in this life.

Then Jonah sought news about them and discovered that the punishment had been turned away from them. It is as if he had been unaware that they had turned to faith and repented. Instead, he continued on his way, infuriated at them, resembling a slave who was fleeing from his master in wrath, thinking that his master had no power over him, and he set sail upon the sea in the laden ship.

Then, the enormous whale approached, and the sailors could not find anyone to throw overboard to appease it with in order to save the ship, so they cast lots, and it fell to Jonah to be cast off. So they threw him into the sea, and the whale swallowed him up, and the ship was saved.

Then God kept him alive and hale in its belly for several days and nights. Knowing that this was a trial from God on account of what he had done, Jonah called out to God from the belly of the whale, "*There is*

no god but You! I was wrong" (21:87).

So God responded to his call and ordered the whale to eject him onto a barren piece of shore. Jonah was feeling ill, and so God caused a gourd-tree to sprout so that he could take shelter under its leaves. Then, when he felt better, God sent him back to his people. This time, they answered his call and believed, and God granted them provision and enjoyment for a time.

There are many Shiʿi narrations about the story of Jonah, as well as some Sunni narrations; some of them share content with each other along the lines of what can be deduced from the verses, although the shared content does not introduce anything that cannot be deduced from the Qur'anic verses. Also, some narrations differ with each other over details not found in the verses.[1]

2. His Story Among the People of the Book

He is known [in Arabic] as Yūnāh ibn Amtāy. The Old and New Testaments allude to some of his story, like his sojourn in the whale; however, they do not mention his full story.

In *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, al-Ālūsī[2] relates some of his story as understood by the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], and supports some of his account with refers to some of their books.[3] In short, the account is as follows:

God commanded him to go to the people of Nineveh,[4] which was enormous at that time, and it took him three days to get there. The people had grown vile and corrupt. Overwhelmed, he fled and headed towards the city of Tarsīs (Tarshish). He paid for passage on a boat; however, wild winds stirred up, and the waves lashed out, and the ship was in danger of sinking.

Terrified, the sailors threw some of their cargo into the ocean to lighten the ship. At that time, Jonah went below deck and fell asleep, and

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1 For that reason, we have not mentioned disparate narrations (*āḥād*) because they cannot serve as evidence here [that is, in ascertaining the details of sacred history], and the details in them cannot be verified by the verses. This is apparent to anyone who consults them.

2 Sayyid Maḥmūd ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusaynī al-Ālūsī al-Baghdādī (1802–1854), an Iraqi scholar best known for the exegesis *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*. [Trans.]

3 Such as *Qāmūs al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas* (A Biblical Dictionary).

4 One of the great Assyrian cities, on the banks of the Tigris.

thus got ill. The captain of the ship came to him and demanded, "What is wrong with you; why are you sleeping? Get up and pray to your god; perhaps your god will save us from our situation and not destroy us."

Some of the sailors said to others, "Come and cast lots so we can find out which one of us has brought this evil upon us." They cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. They asked him, "What have you done, where have you come from, and where are you going, and what village and tribe are you from?"

He told them, "I am a servant of the Lord God of the Heavens, the creator of land and sea." And he told them what happened. Greatly fearing, they asked, "Why did you do what you did?" and blamed him for that.

Then they asked, "What should we do with you now so that the sea will calm?" He said, "Throw me into the sea, so it will calm, because it was my fault that these giant waves came." The sailors tried to return him to shore but were unable to, so they took Jonah and threw him into the sea in order to save the others. The sea calmed, and God ordered an enormous whale to come and swallow him, and he remained in its belly for three days and nights, praying to his Lord and beseeching God to rescue him. So God commanded the whale to expel him back onto dry land. Then He said, "Rise, and go to Nineveh, and preach to its people as I commanded you to do before."

He left and called out, "Nineveh will be sunk into the land after three days!" So [a group of] the people of Nineveh believed in God and called upon all the people the people to fast and wear monks' or beggars' clothes [sackcloth and ashes]. The news reached the king, and he rose from his throne, put aside his royal vestments, clad himself in tattered rags, sat in the dust, and had his criers proclaim that none of the people or animals would touch food or drink. They came closer to God and abandoned their vile deeds and wrongdoing, so God had mercy upon them and did not send the punishment upon them.

Jonah grew sad and said, "My God, this is what I fled from—and I know you are merciful, compassionate, patient, and accepting of those who return to you. O Lord! Take my soul, for death is better for me now than life"

God said, "O Jonah! Are you very sad about this?"

He said, "Yes, Lord."

So Jonah left and sat facing the city. A shelter was built for him, and he sat under it so that he could see what would happen to the city. God

commanded a gourd-tree to grow, and it grew up over his head so that it could give him shade from his suffering [in the sun]. He rejoiced at the gourd-tree greatly, but then God commanded a worm to afflict it, and it shriveled up; then, a hot wind rose up and the sun beat down onto the head of Jonah. This was difficult for him, and he would have rather died.

So God said, "O Jonah! Are you very sad about the gourd-tree?"

He said, "Yes, Lord, I am very sad about it."

God said, "You are sad over something that you yourself did not labour or dig to plant; rather, it grew in one night and was destroyed in one night? Shall We show no pity on the enormous city of Nineveh, which has more than twelve hill-mounds, each of whose people do not know their right from their left [that is, they are ignorant], and many animals?

Comment: The differences between this account and the Qur'anic account are apparent: for instance, his fleeing from his position as his messenger and his dissatisfaction with God's lifting the punishment while he knew they believed and had repented.

Some might argue that similar things are mentioned in the Qur'an—for instance, in Sūrah al-Ṣaffāt, when Jonah flees like a fugitive slave; or, in Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ, his anger and thinking that God did not have power over him.

In response, I would say that there is a difference. The Old and New Testaments do not shy away from attributing disobedience or even mortal sins to the prophets. There is no reason to pay heed to ascriptions of disobedience to him. This is unlike the Qur'an, which absolves the prophets of any sort of sin, even trifling ones. Therefore, anything that may imply disobedience on their part should be interpreted in the best way according to what the context and evidence given in the verses indicates—for instance, *Behold! he fled* (37:140) or *when he went away in wrath, and imagined that We had no power over him* (21:87)—may be taken as figures of speech describing his deed [not literally to mean that he actually abandoned his role as a messenger].

3. God's Praise of Jonah

God praises Jonah in the following ways:

(1) He was one of the faithful (21:88).

(2) God chose him and made him one of the virtuous (68:50). (And you have already come to know that he was specifically chosen for his sincerity in worship.)

(3) He is counted among the prophets. He shares the virtues of the prophets—which make them excel all others in all the nations—and God guided them to the straight path (6:87).

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Man Lā Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh*, it is related from Imām al-Ṣādiq: Whenever a people cast lots and leave the matter to God—the Mighty and Glorious—to decide, the lot comes out on the side of truth.

What matter is more just than drawing a lot when the matter is put to God? Did not God, the Mighty and Glorious, say *they cast lots, and he was one of those who were thrown off* (37:141)?

(2) In *Biḥār al-Anwār*, it is related from the book *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt* with a chain of narration from Ḥabbah al-ʿAranī that he said that the Commander of the Faithful said:

God presented my *wilāyah* to the inhabitants of the heavens and earth. Those who confessed to it confessed to it, and those who rejected it rejected it. Jonah abstained from it, and so God trapped him in the belly of the whale until he confessed to it.

Author's comments: There are other narrations expressing the same meaning. Here, *wilāyah* refers to the comprehensive divine authority which Imām ʿAlī was the first to open the door to from this *ummah*. It is when God takes charge of His servant and takes his position to manage his affairs, such that the servant would never turn towards anyone but God or never wish for anything other than what God wills. This comes along with traversing the path of servitude which ends with God selecting him exclusively for Himself not letting anything or anyone having any share in him.

The appearance of what Jonah committed was something that God was not pleased with and could not be attributed to His will. Therefore, God tried him so that he would confess that he had wronged himself, and that God was exalted above such a will. Trials and tribulations such as this are for God's *awliyāʾ* (those who are close to Him). They are how God trains them, perfects them, and raises their stations, even if some come across as reprimands. As is said, *al-balāʾ lil-wulāʾ* (trials are for the friends of God, or the saints).

(3) This is reinforced by a narration in *ʿIlal [al-Sharāʾiʿ]* with a chain of narration from Abū Baṣīr, in which he says:

I [Abū Baṣīr] asked Imām al-Ṣādiq, "Why did God deflect punishment from the people of Jonah when it was hanging over them, but He did not do that for any other people?"
He said, "This was because it was in the knowledge of God that He would deflect it from them due to their repenting. However, He did not inform Jonah of that because He wanted to free him [from other considerations] for worship in the belly of the whale, and for him to merit being rewarded and honored for this."[1]

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1 This narration also means that God intended (*irādah ʿazm*) Jonah to leave his people so that he ends up in the belly of the whale for worship. That is why God did not inform him about the deflection of the punishment. [Pub.]

Verses 149–182

Previously, God pronounced that He is the Lord [to be] worshipped. His sincere, purified servants—like the prophets and the honored ones—worship Him, and others deny Him. His servants will be saved, and those who deny Him will endure harrowing torment.

These verses present what they [obviously, not the monotheists] believed about their demigods, who were angels and jinn; and how they held that the angels were daughters of God and that there was a blood tie between God and the jinn.

The Brahmins, Buddhists, and Sabians did not hold that all of the angels were female, although they said that some of them were. However, it has come down to us that some of the Arab tribes who worshipped idols—like the Juhaynah, the Sulaym, the Khuzāʿah, and the Banū Malīḥ—did maintain that all of the angels were female. However, all held that the jinn were ultimately descended from God.

These verses point out the flaws in their beliefs. Then they give the Prophet glad tidings of divine assistance, and threaten others with punishment. The chapter ends by absolving God [of the notions that they ascribed to Him that did not befit Him], sending greetings to the messengers, and praising God, the Lord of the worlds.

فَاسْتَفْتِهِمْ أَلِرَبِّكَ الْبَنَاتُ وَلَهُمُ الْبَنُونَ ﴿١٤٩﴾

(37:149) ***So ask them, does your Lord have daughters while they have sons?***

Here, God dissects their assertion that the angels are daughters of God into its necessary concomitants—namely, that the angels are His children, that they are girls, and that God preferred girls for Himself while they prefer boys. Then He refutes these premises one by one. So, He refutes their claim that He has girls while they have boys by saying: *So ask them, does your Lord have daughters while they have sons?* (37:149) This is a rhetorical question; the answer is "no". Their claim would imply that they were above God! For they favored sons over daughters to such an extent that they tried to rid themselves of the blemish of having daughters by

burying them alive.

أَمْ خَلَقْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِنَاثًا وَهُمْ شَاهِدُونَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

(37:150) ***Or* (am)** ***did We create the angels female while they were witnessing?***

The conjunction *or* (am munqaṭiʿah) introduces a new clause [rather than being an either-or statement]. It has the meaning of, "Nay, did We create the angels female while they were witnessing their creation? They did not witness them being created. It is not their place to claim this, for it is only possible to establish whether a being is male or female through sensory perception." This refutes their assertion that the angels are female.

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ مِنْ إِفْكِهِمْ لَيَقُولُونَ ﴿١٥١﴾ وَلَدَ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ ﴿١٥٢﴾

(37:151–152) ***Behold, it is part of their own lie* (ifkihim)** ***that they say, "Allah has children". They are lying!***

This refutes their claim that God has children, for it is something that they have made up themselves, through equivocating and falsifying, this being the meaning of *ifk*. They are declaring that the angels were born the same way people are, but they are lying [especially since none of them were there to see it].

أَصْطَفَى الْبَنَاتِ عَلَى الْبَنِينَ ﴿١٥٣﴾ مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ ﴿١٥٤﴾ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٥٥﴾

(37:153–155) ***He chose daughters over sons? What is wrong with you—how do you decide this? Why do you not reflect?***

This reiterates that it is wrong for them to say that God chose daughters over sons—the idea that God preferred this being a necessary corollary to their belief—for it would be disgraceful [to them].

What is wrong with you—how do you decide this? It censures them, for they have made this judgment without any evidence. This is followed by *why do you not reflect?*—also reprimanding them—which implies that not only is their claim baseless, but evidence would suggest the opposite. Were they to think about it, it would become clear to them that the divine is too exalted to split into parts to procreate, or even to need to have

children. These arguments are presented in various parts of these verses.

The text shifts from third to second person to express that the divine anger is so severe that God must deign to address those who hold these corrupt beliefs directly.

أَمْ لَكُمْ سُلْطَانٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٥٦﴾ فَأْتُوا بِكِتَابِكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

(37:156–157) ***Or* (am)** ***do you have clear proof? Bring your book, if you be truthful.***

The conjunction *or* (am munqaṭiʿah) introduces a new clause [rather than being an either-or statement]. The verses indicate that the intent behind *proof* (sulṭān) is a book revealed from God, informing people that the angels are His daughters. Since neither the intellect nor the five senses can determine the gender of the angels, the only remaining option is for this to be established by a book revealed from God. Were their claim correct, and were they telling the truth, they would have produced a book.

Their is appended to *book* (*bi-kitābihim*, "their book") to emphasize that they were required to have a book to demonstrate their claim.

وَجَعَلُوا بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ الْجِنَّةِ نَسَبًا ۚ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمَتِ الْجِنَّةُ إِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ ﴿١٥٨﴾

(37:158) ***And they ascribed ties of kinship between Him and the jinn, while the jinn know that they shall surely be brought forth [for divine judgment].***

They ascribed ties of kinship between God and the jinn by claiming that the jinn were born from God. Their claim has already been examined in depth in the exegesis of Sūrah Hūd, in the discussion on the worship of idols.

***While the jinn know that they shall surely be brought forth* (muḥḍarūn):** Meaning they will be brought forth for accounting or to the fire, given the negative connotations of *muḥḍarūn*. Regardless of wherever exactly it may mean, the jinn know that they are under God's lordship and will be judged and recompensed for their deeds. Therefore, the relationship between them and God is that of a lord and a servant, not one of a parent and child; and it is not fitting to worship a being which is subject to someone else's lordship.

Some exegetes have held a truly strange view: that the intent behind *jinn* (jinnah) here is a group of the angels called *jinnah*. This necessitates

that the pronoun *they* refers to the faithless, not the *jinnah*. However, this is one of those views that has no evidence in the Qur'an; additionally, it is rather distant from what the text actually says.

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿١٥٩﴾ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿١٦٠﴾

(37:159–160) ***Glory be to Allah above what they ascribe*** **(yaṣifūn)*! Except for Allah's purified servants*** **(mukhlaṣīn).**

The subject of *yaṣifūn* is the faithless (keeping in mind the link between this verse and the previous verses). It refers to the faithless who were mentioned before. The clause of exception here is non-inclusive (*munqaṭiʿ*). It means that either (a) God is above their description of Him, or (b) God is above what the faithless say about Him (for instance, that He has children, that He has blood ties with created beings, or that He has partners). However, the purified, sincere servants of God describe God befittingly.

There are other views on this clause of exception. Some say that it is a non-inclusive exception, making a this/not-this construction with the pronoun *they* in *they shall surely be brought forth* [that is, "they shall be brought forth—except for God's purified, sincere servants"]. Others say that the exception hinges on the subject of *they ascribed* [that is, "they ascribed blood ties to God—except God's purified, sincere servants"], and that the intervening text is parenthetical. However, both of these views are unlikely.

On their own, these two verses have a broader and more precise meaning, for the subject of *what they ascribe* can be taken to be people as a whole. "Ascribe" here would then refer to all the ways that people describe God. In this case, the exception would be inclusive [in that the purified, sincere servants of God are also human beings], and it would mean that God is above the way that all people describe Him, apart from the purified, sincere servants of God [who describe Him appropriately].

This is because they describe God with their limited understandings, whereas God is unlimited and unbounded. No description of Him can arrive at [His true nature]. He is above any way that they describe Him. He is unlike however they imagine Him. However, God has purified, sincere servants whom He has purified selected for Himself. They do not associate anything with Him, and so He has made Himself known to them and made them forget everything but Him. They know Him and know things

other than Him by Him. So when they reflect inwardly on Him, they envision Him in a way that befits the divine majesty, and when they describe Him in words—even though words are insufficient and limited in meaning—the confess to the inadequacy of their speech and the faltering of the tongue. As the Prophet said—and he is the foremost of God's sincere, purified servants—"I cannot praise you sufficiently; You are as you have praised Yourself."[1] Understand that!

فَإِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿١٦١﴾ مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ بِفَاتِنِينَ ﴿١٦٢﴾ إِلَّا مَنْ هُوَ صَالِ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿١٦٣﴾

(37:161–163) ***Truly, you and what you worship are not tempting [anyone] away from Him except for the one on the way to hell*** **(ṣāl al-jaḥīm).**

This sentence [which begins with the conjunction *fa-*, which is omitted in translation] is a result of what the two previous verses imply [the exception and what is being excepted from; that is, *Glory be to Allah above what they ascribe! Except for Allah's purified servants*] or only what the exclusion implies. It means, "Your erroneous notions of God—and the purified, sincere servants of God do not err in their descriptions of God—do not entice anyone to follow you except those already walking the path to the fire."

It is clear from the text that the pronoun *mā* ("what") in *mā taʿbudūn* ("what you worship") is a relative pronoun [as opposed to some other usage of *mā*], and by it is intended either (a) just the idols, or (b) the idols and false gods, like demon-jinn. However, *mā* in *mā antum* ("you… are not") means "not". The pronoun suffix *-hi* ("him") in *mā antum ʿalayhi* ("away from Him") refers to God, and the adverbial phrase "away from Him" describes *fātinīn* ("tempting", i.e. "tempting away from Him").

Fātinīn ("tempting") is the [plural] active participle of the verb root *f-t-n*,[2] and means "misguiding". *Ṣāl* is from the verb root *ṣ-l-w* and means "to follow".[3] Therefore, a person who is *ṣāl al-jaḥīm* is traipsing after the

1 For he has praised God by wholly acknowledging his incapacity to do so, since he wills only what God wills with respect to how God praises Himself.

2 From the same root as *fitna*, meaning "discord" or "temptation". [Trans.]

3 Today, this verb root is more often used to mean "prayer" (*ṣalāt*) or "to send

fire. While the precise word that the exception applies to is omitted, it essentially means, "You are not tempting *anyone* [this being the implied omitted word] except for the one who is already following the way towards the fire."

Some exegetes maintain that the first *mā* in *mā taʿbudūn* [translated as "what you worship"] is either a gerundive particle or a relative pronoun, and that the sentence *you and what you worship* is an independent, self-contained expression, along the lines of "you and your lot". That is, "you" and "what you worship" are paired together. Then *mā antum ʿalayhi bi-fātinīn* is a new sentence; *fātinīn*, according to this view, would mean "imposing something on someone" or "burdening someone with something" [these being non-conventional meanings of *fātinīn*]. If the first *mā* is a gerundive particle, the pronoun suffix *-hi* in *ʿalayhi* refers back to *mā taʿbudūn*; if it is a relative pronoun, it would refers back to *mā* itself, with the idea that something was implicitly appended to the *mā* but was left unstated. It would mean, "You can only impose your demigods on those who are already on the way to the fire."

Some exegetes have also put forward the possibility that the preposition *ʿalā* [in *ʿalayhi*] really means *bi-* ("with"), and the pronoun suffix *-hi* refers to *what you worship* or *what* (if it is taken to be a relative pronoun). *Fātinīn* then takes on its conventional meaning (rather than "impose"); all in all, it would mean, "You cannot mislead anyone through your worship or by worshipping what you worship unless they are already following the path to hell."

These views, however, are rather feigned and are not necessitated by the text. The reason behind the shift in person in the text has already been discussed [in the section on verses 37:153–155].

وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَعْلُومٌ ﴿١٦٤﴾ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الصَّافُّونَ ﴿١٦٥﴾ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ ﴿١٦٦﴾

(37:164–166) ***There is no one who lacks an assigned place. And we are the ones who arrange themselves in ranks, and we are the ones who glorify [Allah].***

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blessings upon" (*ṣalawāt*). The meaning of "following" is associated with racing animals, such horses; for instance, which horse follows which as they race towards the goal. [Trans.]

These three verses are an intervening utterance in the voice of Jibraʾīl, or Jibraʾīl and his angelic aides assisting him in delivering the revelation. It is similar to the following verse [in the voice of Jibraʾīl, or Jibraʾīl and other angels] in Sūrah Maryam:

> *And we only descend at the command of your Lord; to Him belongs whatever is before us and whatever is behind us and whatever is between these.* (19:64)

This is what the text implies. However, some exegetes are of the view that the Prophet is actually speaking here [that is, it is revelation composed in the voice of the Prophet], describing himself and those who believe in him to those who rejected him to lessen their morale and upbraid them. In this view, grammatically, it would be connected back to *fa-astaftihim* ("so ask them", 37:149), and would mean: "So ask them, then say, 'Every one of us Muslims has an assigned place due to his deeds on the Day of Judgment. We are the ones who line ourselves up in ranks for the ritual prayer, and we are the ones who glorify God."

However, this view is rather contrived, and does not match the actual text.

Rather, these three verses refute the claim that the angels are deities with their own independent will by showing that the non-monotheists' views are self-contradictory. The non-monotheists do not deny that the angels are servants or worshippers of God, or that they are under the care and protection of God (that is, that God is their Lord). However, they also see them as deities or demigods who act independently to administer the parts of the cosmos which God has put under their domain; and, in doing so, they are not tied in the slightest to the divine will. Here, the angels themselves deny this. However, they do not deny that they play an intermediary role between God and the creation; as God says:

> *They do not precede Him in speech, and do as they are told* (21:27)

There is no one who lacks an assigned place: Meaning, a specific post. It does not mean that God has delegated control over parts of the universe to the angels and granted them free reign in how they administer it. Instead, they have been fashioned to obey God, to carry out His commands, and to worship Him.

And we are the ones that arrange themselves in ranks: Meaning, "We [angels] line up in ranks before God to await His command in how to administer the cosmos, so that we may carry out the divine will."

This view is supported by the verse *they do not disobey Allah in what He*

commands, and they do as they are told (66:6), as well as the text. Possibly, it could also be said to mean that they line themselves up for prayer before God. However, this interpretation does not spring directly to mind from the text, nor is there any evidence for it.

We are the ones who glorify [Allah]: Meaning, We are the ones who absolve God of anything that would not befit the divine majesty. This is similar to the verse: *They praise Him night and day, and do not tire* (21:20).

Altogether, these three verses describe the position and role of the angels vis-a-visa the created world. That is, they line up to receive the divine command and absolve the divine majesty of anything that could be construed as a partner to it or anything that does not befit the perfection or exaltation of the divine essence.

وَإِنْ كَانُوا لَيَقُولُونَ ﴿١٦٧﴾ لَوْ أَنَّ عِنْدَنَا ذِكْرًا مِنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٦٨﴾ لَكُنَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

(37:167–169) ***Even if they used to say, "If only we had a reminder from the ancients, We would certainly have been purified, sincere servants of Allah."***

This resumes the thread of discussion in the previous verses [that is, before the intervention in the voice of the angels].

Even if they used to say: *They* refers to the Quraysh as well as anyone else who shared the beliefs of the Quraysh. The Arabic particle *in* in *even if* (wa in kānū) is the lightened form (al-mukhaffafah min al-thaqīlah) of the Arabic particle *inna*. The intent behind *a reminder from the ancients* is a heavenly book like the ones that were revealed to the other ancient peoples.

If means, "If only we had a heavenly book like those which were sent in times of yore to the ancients. We would have been guided; we would have been sincere servants of God." They are making excuses for disbelieving on the grounds that they never received a book from God.

However, their line of thought is erroneous, since idol-worshipping religions cannot have their own prophets from God or divinely revealed books.

فَكَفَرُوا بِهِ ۖ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

(37:170) ***But they rejected it; so they shall soon know.***

The conjunction *fa-* [which introduces the verse, here translated as "but"] is a stylistic device which implies that there is something implied but omitted which is the reason behind the next statement (*fāʾ faṣīḥa*). It means something akin to, "We sent the Qur'an to them, but they rejected it, and did not abide by their promise [to follow a scripture]. So they shall soon know and see the implications of their rejection." God is warning them.

وَلَقَدْ سَبَقَتْ كَلِمَتُنَا لِعِبَادِنَا الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٧١﴾ إِنَّهُمْ لَهُمُ الْمَنْصُورُونَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

(37:171–172) ***And Our word has gone forth with respect to Our servants, the messengers. They shall be the ones who receive divine assistance*** **(innahum la-hum al-manṣūrūn)**

God's *word* (kalimah) here is His decree [to aid them]. *Our word has gone forth* (sabaqat) means either that has already been sworn as a divine promise, or else that it has already been manifested through the act of granting the messengers power and victory. The *l-* [in *la-hum*] reinforces the certainty of that decree—that they shall certainly receive divine aid. Several features of these verses emphasize that this divine promise shall come to pass [such as *laqad* at the beginning of the verse, the particle *inna*, and the *l-* in *la-hum*].

Divine assistance (naṣr) here is left unqualified, such that it could refer to divine assistance in this world, or in the next, or something else. The verse itself defies restriction. It is similar to how God says:

> *Surely We help Our messengers, and those who believe, in this world's life and on the day when the witnesses shall stand.* (40:51)

So, for instance, the messengers receive divine assistance in the form of the proof they are given, for they are on the path of truth, and truth can never be vanquished. They are also divinely aided against their enemies—either immediately (when face-to-face with their enemies), or later, when the divine takes vengeance on their behalf. God says:

> *Until the messengers despaired and the people became sure that they were indeed told a lie, Our help came to them and whom We pleased was delivered; and Our punishment is not averted from the guilty people.* (12:110)

They also receive divine assistance in the hereafter:

> *On the day on which Allah will not abase the Prophet and those who believe with him.* (66:8)

A verse in Sūrah al-Muʾmin which shares the same meaning has been

discussed before.

وَإِنَّ جُنْدَنَا لَهُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ ﴿١٧٣﴾

(37:173) ***And Our hosts*** **(jundanā)** ***shall be victorious.***

A *jund* is a dense assembly. For that reason, *jund* is used for a contingent of soldiers (*ʿaskar*). It is close in meaning to *ḥizb* ("party", "contingent").[1] God says elsewhere:

> *And whoever takes Allah and His messenger and those who believe for a guardian, then surely the party (*ḥizb*) of Allah are the triumphant.* (5:56)

Our hosts (jundanā) here refers to a group which is united on following the divine command and striving in God's way. It refers either to the faithful alone, or else to the prophets and the faithful who followed them (although this latter possibility would, like the prophets that they follow, involve generalization after limitation.) In either case, it means that the faithful—like the prophets whom they follow will always receive divine aid. God says:

> *And be not infirm, and be not grieving; you shall have the upper hand, if you be believers.* (3:139)

Some verses showing this have already been mentioned.

The divine decree that God will grant ultimate assistance or victory to the believers is a social or universal law which is subject to a condition [namely, that the faithful are truly faithful]. Divine assistance has been granted to the prophets—who are servants of God whom God sent as messengers—as well as the faithful. They are the forces of God, acting in accordance with His command and striving in His way. As long as they maintain these characteristics, they shall be victorious and aided. However, if they swerve away from faith and call themselves "believers" only in name (and simply label themselves as "believers"), then they cannot expect divine assistance or victory.

فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ ﴿١٧٤﴾

(37:174) ***So turn away from them for a time***

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1 *Jund* and *ḥizb* are used interchangeably in Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, where God says, *If forces come to you* (in jāʾatkum junūd) (33:9) but then refers to them by saying *and when the faithful saw the forces* (aḥzāb).

This is consequent to the discussion about divine aid and victory. Herein lies a promise to the Prophet of divine aid and victory, particularly against the polytheists and the Quraysh.

The verse first tells the Prophet to turn away from them, but then gives that command a deadline through *for a time*. This hints that this time is actually quite near. Indeed, it was so, for, a short time later, the Prophet migrated to Medina, and God sent the heroes of the Quraysh along onto their eternal journey during the skirmishes in Badr and other places.

وَأَبْصِرْهُمْ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٧٥﴾

(37:175) ***And watch them; they shall also see.***

The command is to watch. The prophecy is that they shall soon see. Linking these sentences together with *turn away* (in the previous verse) gives the idea that one will happen shortly after the other. It can be deduced that it means: "Watch them, and see the denial and stubbornness they display in the face of your warnings. They shall soon realize the result of their denial and arrogance."

أَفَبِعَذَابِنَا يَسْتَعْجِلُونَ ﴿١٧٦﴾ فَإِذَا نَزَلَ بِسَاحَتِهِمْ فَسَاءَ صَبَاحُ الْمُنْذَرِينَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

(37:176–177) ***Are they trying to hasten Our chastisement? When it descends in their midst, it shall be an evil morning for those who were warned.***

This is a reprimand to them—they should not be trying to hasten this. They asked, "When is this supposed to happen? And when is this victory?" It declares that this punishment is something that they should not try to hasten, for it shall befall them on a severe day, a fateful morning.

The sending down of the punishment *in their midst* (bi-sāḥatihim) is a figure of speech for it descending upon them from every direction, encompassing them. *It shall be an evil morning for those who were warned* means that it will be their most wretched morning, and *those who were warned* are the polytheists among the Quraysh.

وَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ ﴿١٧٨﴾ وَأَبْصِرْ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٧٩﴾

(37:178–179) ***And turn away from them for a time. And watch; they shall also see.***

Exegetes say that these verses emphasise the two preceding verses (37:174–175) by essentially repeating them. Some exegetes have suggested that the first set of verses (37:174–175) warn them of earthly punishment, whereas these two verses (37:178–179) warn them of otherworldly punishment. However, this view is not without problems, for the first verse says *watch them*, whereas this verse just says *watch*. This implies that this verse should be taken more generally. That is, it implies watching how the majority of human beings fall into faithlessness or hypocrisy. Thus, it is better understood as warning of the torment on the day of resurrection in general.

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿١٨٠﴾

(37:180) ***Glory be to your Lord, the Lord of Might, above what they ascribe.***

This absolves God of what the faithless opponents of the Prophet ascribed to Him; what they said was mentioned previously in this chapter.

The proof of this lies in the construction of the verse (*subḥāna rabbika rabb-i al-ʿizzati*). There are two appended constructions here: *glory be to your Lord* (subḥāna rabbika) and *Lord of might* (rabb-i al-ʿizzati). The first construction absolves "the Lord you worship and pray to" of what they say. The second construction makes it clear that only God is the *Lord of Might*. He is absolutely unshakeable; none can humiliate or overpower Him, and none can escape Him. The polytheists are enemies of the truth; they have been warned of the punishment, and can do nothing to Him.

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٨١﴾

(37:181) ***And peace be upon the messengers.***

This greeting of peace is offered to all the messengers. It declares that, before God, they are protected from [divine] torment or other miseries.

وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٨٢﴾

(37:182) ***And praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.***

This was discussed in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Fātiḥah.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Muḥammad ibn Naḍr and Ibn ʿAsākir relate from al-ʿĀlāʾ ibn Saʿīd:
One day, the Messenger of God said to his sitting-companions: "The sky has become constricted, and indeed, rightfully so, for there is no spot in it that an angel could place its feet on that does not already have a bowing or prostrating angel on it." Then he recited: *We are the ones who line up, and we are the ones who exalt [Allah]*. (37:165–166)

Author's comments: Narrations with this meaning have also been related from him via other chains.

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh relates from Anas:
Whenever the Prophet stood for prayer, he would say, "Stand evenly. Come forward, so-and-so; and move back, so-and-so. Straighten your lines; God and the angels will that you be guided." Then he would recite: *We are the ones who line up, and we are the ones who exalt [Allah]*. (37:165–166)

(3) In *Nahj al-Balāghah*, it is related from Imam ʿAlī in his description of the angels:
[Some of the angels] are in ranks and never leave their positions, and glorify [God] without tiring.

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Chapter 38

Sūrah Ṣad

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Verses 1–16

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah centres on the theme that the Prophet has been sent as a warner with revelation[1] from the divine environs calling people to the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) and sincerity in worship.

The sūrah is divided into the following sections:

It begins by describing the deniers (*kuffār*)—their haughtiness, disunity, and total arrogance towards following him or believing in him. It describes how they keep people away from him and utter baseless claims, which are refuted in a separate section.

Then it commands the Prophet to be patient and recalls the stories of God's ancient worshippers.

Then it speaks of the fate of those who are mindful of God versus the evildoers.

Then it commands the Prophet to proclaim his message and call to the oneness of God. It also commands him to pronounce that the followers of Satan are doomed to the fire, for God decreed this on the day when He ordered the angels to prostrate to Adam, and Iblīs refused; therefore, he was cursed, and it was decreed that he and whoever followed him would end up in the Fire.

The context indicates that the sūrah was revealed in Mecca.

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ص ۚ وَٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ ذِي ٱلذِّكۡرِ ۝١ بَلِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فِي عِزَّةٖ وَشِقَاقٖ ۝٢

(38:1–2) Ṣād. ***By the Qur'an, full of remembrance*** **(dhikr),** ***the rejectors are in vainglory*** **(ʿizzah)** ***and schism*** **(shiqāq).**

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1 *Al-dhikr*, lit. "remembrance", another name for the Qur'an. [Trans.]

Remembrance (dhikr) here refers to the remembrance of God—His uniqueness and things that derive from that, such as an understanding of the truths of the Resurrection and prophethood. *Vainglory* (ʿizzah) here implies "snubbing" or "turning their noses up at". *Schism* (shiqāq) means "dissention" or "factionalism". *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:

The word was originally used to mean to place each of the two groups in a different compartment (*shiq*), that is in different sides. The expression *shaqq fulānun al-ʿaṣā* (so-and-so broke the unity) is also derived from that.

By the Qur'an, full of remembrance is an oath similar to these oaths in the Qur'an:

Yā sīn. By the wise Book…. (36:1–2)
Qāf. By the noble Qur'an…. (50:1)
Nūn. By the pen…. (68:1)

Like the other oaths, it is not grammatically appended to the next verse [with a conjunction such as *and*]. What is being sworn is found in *the rejectors are in vainglory and schism*; that is, their haughtiness is what prevents them from accepting the Prophet, even though many peoples before them perished for this reason. Then it recounts the Prophet's warning and their response, as well as what he called them to. It is as if what is being sworn here is: "You are one of the [divinely sent] warners. This is also evinced by the fact that they spurn you, abhorred by your warning, time and time again."

Exegetes have put forward many ideas about the meanings of *by the wise Qur'an* and the grammatical structure; however, most of them cannot really be derived from the text, so we have omitted them since it would not be useful to mention them.

It means—and God knows best—"I swear by the Qur'an containing remembrance that you are one of the warners. Those who deny you are prevented from accepting it and following it, and hence oppose it."

كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنْ قَرْنٍ فَنَادَوْا وَلَاتَ حِينَ مَنَاصٍ ﴿٣﴾

(38:3) *How many generations* (qurūn, sing. qarn) *did We destroy before them? They cried out when the time for escape* (manāṣ) *had passed.*

Qarn are the people of a specific era. According to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, *manāṣ* comes from the root *n-a-ṣ* (*nāṣa*, *yanūṣ*). *Manāṣ* with an *n* means "to lag behind"; as with *b* [instead of n], it means "to advance". It is said

to mean "to flee" or "to escape".

It means, "We destroyed many ancient peoples before them. They received messengers and were warned but, like them, denied the warning. When the punishment descended, they called out, 'Woe betide us! We were wrongdoers'"—or else "they cried out to God for help. But the time had passed for the punishment to be delayed"—or else "there was nowhere to flee".

وَعَجِبُوا أَنْ جَاءَهُمْ مُنْذِرٌ مِنْهُمْ ۖ وَقَالَ الْكَافِرُونَ هَٰذَا سَاحِرٌ كَذَّابٌ ﴿٤﴾

(38:4) ***And they wonder that a warner has come to them from themselves, while the rejectors say, "He is a lying sorcerer."***

Meaning, they are astonished that a warner has arisen among their own people, a human being like themselves, for the idol-worshippers disdained the idea of a human messenger.

The rejectors say, "He is a lying sorcerer": This indicates that they accused the Prophet of sorcery because they were unable to come up with something similar to the Qur'an. *Lying* (kadhdhāb) means that they were accusing him of fabricating the Qur'an and the truths within it, and falsely claiming that it came from God.

أَجَعَلَ الْآلِهَةَ إِلَٰهًا وَاحِدًا ۖ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَشَيْءٌ عُجَابٌ ﴿٥﴾

(38:5) ***"Does he make all the gods into a single god? This is a mind-boggling thing*** **(la-shayʾun ʿujāb)*!"***

ʿUjāb ("very strange", "mind-boggling") with a single *j* is an exaggerated form of *ʿajab* ("wonderous", "unusual"); it is even stronger if the *j* is doubled.

With this expression of amazement, phrased as a rhetorical question, the deniers (*kāfirīn*) conclude their speech. *Make* (jaʿala) here means "he made it into" or "he pronounced that they were"; exegetes have noted that *make* here refers to non-real things, such as their false articles of faith, not actual things, as in the verse: *And they made the angels who are servants of the Merciful female* (43:19). [That is, they declared that the angels were female, not that they actually tinkered with the angels to turn them into females.] Essentially, they are accusing the Prophet of morphing all their demigods into a single god to deny that their demigods hold any divinity, and of decreeing that the only god is *Allah*.

وَانْطَلَقَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْهُمْ أَنِ امْشُوا وَاصْبِرُوا عَلَىٰ آلِهَتِكُمْ ۖ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَشَيْءٌ يُرَادُ ﴿٦﴾

(38:6) ***And their noblemen go about [saying], "Keep adhering patiently to your gods. This is what is desired."***

By saying that it was their chiefs or noblemen who were going around saying that, it hints that the noblemen were working together to try to solve the problem of the Prophet's call to monotheism and his disavowal of their gods. They had decided to try to do this through some form of conciliation, and so they spoke to the Prophet. However, he refused to budge, so some of them went around saying to others—or else they said to their underlings—"keep on patiently adhering to your gods". This interpretation is reinforced by some narrations on the cause of revelation of this verse, which shall be mentioned in the section on narrations, God willing.

"Keep adhering patiently **(amshū wa aṣbirū)** ***to your gods":*** It is understood from the text that this is what the noblemen are telling people [even though there is no actual verb "say" in the text]. They are telling the people to keep on worshipping their gods even though the Prophet has disgraced and slandered them. From the text, it seems most likely that the noblemen are saying this to each other, although possibly they are saying this to the masses.

"This is what is desired **(inna hādhā la-shayʾun yurād)** ***":*** The noblemen are implying that the Prophet is seeking something that people naturally desire—namely, leadership—and that he concocted his prophetic mission as a pretext to gain power. This is similar to what the chieftains of the people of Noah told their people:

> *"He is only a man like you who wants to lord himself over you"* (23:24).

This is the most direct reading of the text. However, exegetes have put forward other meanings of *"this is what is desired"*:

(1) "This steadfastness that we have witnessed from him in holding firm to his demands and persevering in his religion is a great and desirable (*yurād*) thing."

(2) "What is happening now is one of the vagaries of Time that has been fated for us (*yurādu binā*). The only way out is to keep going and persevere."

(3) "Patience is a noble virtue which is desirable (*yurād*) for us in matters like this."

There are also other interpretations; however, these views are weak and do not fit with the text.

مَا سَمِعْنَا بِهَٰذَا فِي الْمِلَّةِ الْآخِرَةِ إِنْ هَٰذَا إِلَّا اخْتِلَاقٌ ﴿٧﴾

(38:7) ***"We heard nothing of this in the latest religions. It is but an invention."***

The latest religions (al-millah al-ākhirah) means the religions of recent generations and practiced by their contemporaries, in contrast to ancient religions. It is as if they are saying, "This is not today's religion; the people of today's world will never accept it. Rather, these are the myths of the ancients."

Some exegetes say that *the latest religions* (al-millah al-ākhirah) is intended to mean "Christianity" because Christianity was the most recent major religion. Furthermore, Christians were not professing belief in the unity of God (*tawḥīd*); rather, they were professing belief in trinity; therefore, it would have been correct for them to say that they had not heard of the idea of *tawḥīd* in the most recent religion—that is, Christianity. However, this interpretation can be refuted by the text itself, especially since Christianity—like Islam—had not taken root [among the polytheists of Mecca].

"It is but an invention": Meaning a lie and a fabrication.

أَأُنْزِلَ عَلَيْهِ الذِّكْرُ مِنْ بَيْنِنَا ۚ بَلْ هُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِنْ ذِكْرِي ۖ بَلْ لَمَّا يَذُوقُوا عَذَابِ ﴿٨﴾

(38:8) ***"Has the Reminder been revealed to one of us?" Nay, they are in doubt about My reminder. Nay, when they taste punishment.***

"Has the Reminder been revealed to one of us?" This is a rhetorical question expressing their distaste. They felt it was deeply unlikely that Muḥammad would have been chosen to receive revelation but not themselves. These words are similar to what they say in *"he is naught but a man like us"* (26:154); that is, they deny that there was anything special about him that would have led to him being chosen as a divine messenger.

Nay, they are in doubt about My reminder: This strikes back at all of

what they were saying. That is, they were not speaking from the perspective of faith and belief in him; rather, they were speaking from the perspective of doubt in his message—that is, the Qur'an.

They did not doubt him because proofs of his prophethood were hidden from them or because these proofs were insufficient to garner certainty. Rather, they doubted him because their hearts clung to falsehood; their attachment to their customs blinded them to his miraculous divine signs. Therefore, they doubted his message even though it itself was miraculous.

Nay, when they taste punishment: This builds on the previous refutation. They do not deny him because they doubt him personally. Rather, their arrogance will never allow them to confess to his truth until they taste the divine punishment. Then, they will be forced to confess to the truth, as was done with others.

When they taste punishment implies that after they taste divine punishment, they will taste nothing other; it warns them of the divine punishment looming over them.

أَمْ عِندَهُمْ خَزَائِنُ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّكَ الْعَزِيزِ الْوَهَّابِ ﴿٩﴾

(38:9) ***Or do they have the treasures of the mercy of your Lord, the mighty, the giver?***

This continues refuting their words. *Or* is disjunctive [meaning it is a fully separate question from the previous]; this verse is similar to: "*Has the reminder been revealed to <u>him</u> among us?*" (38:8) It means, "Do they control the treasures of the mercy of your Lord which He dispenses to whomever He wills, such that they might stop Him from doing that? No, they are His alone, and He knows best whom to appoint as His messenger. He chooses to bestow His special mercy upon whomever He wills."

The verse ends with *the mighty, the giving* to emphasise the main point—that is, they do not control any of the stores of divine mercy because *He* is the one who is mighty and inviolable. None can meddle in divine affairs. Furthermore, it is not their place to withhold divine mercy from anyone, since *He* is the giving, and gives abundantly and copiously.

أَمْ لَهُم مُّلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا ۖ فَلْيَرْتَقُوا فِي الْأَسْبَابِ ﴿١٠﴾

(38:10) ***Or do they have reign over the heavens and earth and***

what is between them? Then let them ascend **(fal-yartaqū)** ***by any means*** **(asbāb).**

Here also, *or* (am) is disjunctive [making it fully separate]. The command to *ascend* is to show that they cannot. *Yartaqū* means "ascend". *Asbāb* ("means") bespeak of stairs or a ladder that they could use to make their way up to the heavens. Perhaps "ascend to the heavens" is goading them to plot some way to distribute or withhold the divine resources.

It means, "If they truly reign over the heavens and the earth, let them administer them and prevent the revelation from descending to a man on My earth. If it be so, let them clamber up to the heavens and stop this revelation from coming down to you."

جُندٌ مَا هُنَالِكَ مَهْزُومٌ مِنَ الْأَحْزَابِ ﴿١١﴾

(38:11) ***A host defeated over there*** **(jundun mā hunālika mahzūm),** ***one of the factions*** **(min al-aḥzāb).**

Defeated (mahzūm) means "deserted" or "forsaken". *One of the factions* (min al-aḥzāb) elaborates on *a host* (jund[un] mā). The particle *mā* indicates that it is a puny, laughable contingent despite their boasting.

The insignificance of the host is reinforced by the fact that *host* (jund[un]) is in the indefinite form, followed by the particle *mā*, and described by *over there* (hunālika), which is used for far-off things. It groups them among the parties that united against the Prophet and which God ultimately put an end to, as will be discussed later. For that reason, this group is described as *defeated* even though they had not yet been defeated at the time of the revelation.

It means, "They are such a tiny, miserable force, defeated over there. They are one of those groups that denied the Messengers and mustered against them; thus, they earned My punishment."

كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَعَادٌ وَفِرْعَوْنُ ذُو الْأَوْتَادِ ﴿١٢﴾ وَثَمُودُ وَقَوْمُ لُوطٍ وَأَصْحَابُ الْأَيْكَةِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ الْأَحْزَابُ ﴿١٣﴾ إِنْ كُلٌّ إِلَّا كَذَّبَ الرُّسُلَ فَحَقَّ عِقَابِ ﴿١٤﴾

(38:12–14) ***The people of Nūh, ʿĀd, and Pharaoh—the lord of spikes, firmly planted, of the tent-poles*** **(dhū al-awtād)***—spurned*

[faith, the messengers] before them. And Thamūd*[1] *and the people of Lūṭ and the dwellers of the wood* (aṣḥāb al-aykah)*: these were the factions. They all denied the messengers, and earned retribution.

The lord of spikes (dhū al-awtād) is an epithet of the Pharaoh. *Awtād* is the plural of *watad* ("tent-stake", "tent-pole", "peg", "spike") and is used in its conventional meaning.

It is said that Pharaoh was called *the lord of spikes* (dhū al-awtād) because:

1) The Pharaoh had his own amusement grounds with posts from which they used to entertain him.

2) Whenever the Pharaoh was angry at any of the prisoners, he would hammer their hands, feet, and head to the ground with stakes and torture them.

3) The Pharaoh had many soldiers who were the backbone of his rule.

There are also other views; however, there is no evidence to prefer one over the other.

The *dwellers of the wood* (aṣḥāb al-aykah) were the people of Shuʿayb. They have already been mentioned in Sūrah al-Ḥijr and Sūrah al-Shuʿarāʾ. *[They] earned retribution* establishes that it was their just desert. It had neared them and ultimately destroyed them.

وَمَا يَنْظُرُ هَٰؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً مَا لَهَا مِنْ فَوَاقٍ ﴿١٥﴾

(38:15) ***They but awaited*** **(yanẓuru)** ***a single blast, with no delay.***

Yanẓuru comes from the verb root *n*-ẓ-r ("to wait for", "to await"). *Fawāq* means "return" or "a scant delay". It means, "These deniers from your people are waiting for nothing but a single blast that will wipe them out. They will no longer be able to turn back or delay; it will be their end."

Some exegetes say that the *blast* here is on the Day of Resurrection, because the people of Muḥammad were granted respite from divine punishment until the Final Hour. However, in the exegesis of Sūrah Yūnus, you already saw that the literal meaning of the verses of the book suggests otherwise; the interested reader can refer back to that.

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1 Three possible renderings of *dhū al-awtād*, an epithet for the Pharaoh, have been presented in the translation to offer a wider range of meaning. [Trans.]

وَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا عَجِّلْ لَنَا قِطَّنَا قَبْلَ يَوْمِ الْحِسَابِ ﴿١٦﴾

(38:16) ***They said, "Our Lord! Hasten for us our fate*** **(qiṭṭanā)** ***before the day of account."***

Qiṭṭ means "lot" or "destiny". By urging that the punishment be hastened before the Day of Resurrection, they are mocking the notion that the Day of Account shall ever come or that punishment has been promised for them.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narration from Jābir, it is related that Imam al-Bāqir said:
Abū Jahl ibn Hishām came forward, and with him were some of the Quraysh. They went to Abū Ṭālib and said, "The son of your brother is annoying us and our gods. Tell him to keep his hands off our gods, and we will keep our hands off his god."
So Abū Ṭālib sent for the Messenger of God. When the Prophet arrived, he did not see anyone in the house except for the polytheists. He said, "Peace be upon whoever follows the right guidance." Then he sat, and Abū Ṭālib related to him what they had told him. Then he [the Prophet] said, "I have a better suggestion. What if I were to put forward a declaration (*kalimah*) by which they would rule the Arabs and tread upon their necks?"
Abū Jahl said, "Sure. What is this declaration?"
He [the Prophet] said, "That they should say *there is no god but Allah*."
They stuck their fingers in their ears and left, saying, "*We heard nothing of this in the latest religions. It is but an invention*" (38:7).
In response, God revealed Qur'an 38:1–7 (from *Ṣād. By the Qur'an, full of remembrance* to *"It is but an invention"*).

(2) Regarding *And they wonder that a warner has come to them from themselves* (37:4), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says:
When the Prophet openly proclaimed his call [to Islam], the Quraysh converged on Abū Ṭālib and said, "Abū Ṭālib! The son of your brother has deprecated our ideals, slandered our gods, corrupted our youth, and divided our people. If he is doing this to be free of want, we have collected enough wealth for him to

make him the richest man of the Quraysh and are ready for him to rule over us [if he stops what he is doing]."

So Abū Ṭālib told the Messenger of God about that, and he replied, "By God! Were they to place the Sun in my right hand and the Moon in my left, I would not want them. Rather, they should gift me this profession (lit. "word"), through which they will rule the Arabs, the non-Arabs will yield to them, and they will be kings in Paradise."

Abū Ṭālib told this to them, and they said, "All right—we will even say ten words."

So the Messenger of God told them, "Bear witness that there is no god but *Allah* and that I am the Messenger of God."

They said, "We pray to 360 gods; we should only worship one?"

So God sent down Qur'an 38:4–7 (from *And they wonder that a warner has come to them from themselves* to "*It is but an invention*"). That is, it was combined with 38:8–11 ("*Has the Reminder been revealed to one of us?" Nay, they are in doubt about My reminder* to *one of the factions*)—"factions" referring to those who allied against the prophet during the siege of Medina (*yawm al-aḥzāb*).

Author's comments: This story is also related through Sunni chains of narration. In some versions of the narration, when the Prophet offers them the profession of *tawḥīd*, they replied, "Ask us for something else."

Upon that, he declared, "Even if you were to get the Sun and put it in my hands, I still would not ask you for anything else [other than to profess these words]."

Infuriated, they took the Prophet's words to mean that they had to give him control over the worldly order, since the Sun and Moon are the greatest operants in the world. Here their sizes are assumed to be what can be sensed with the physical senses to convey the point of the simile.

(3) In *ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ*, it is related with a chain of narration from Isḥāq ibn ʿAmmār:

I [Isḥāq ibn ʿAmmār] asked Imam al-Kāẓim, "Why does one *rakʿah* of prayer have two prostrations? Why are not two prostrations two *rakʿāt*?"

He said, "When you ask something, empty your heart so you may understand. The first *sālāt* was prayed by the Messenger of God. He prayed it in the heavens before God, the Exalted, in front of

His throne. This is because he had ascended to him [during the *miʿrāj*] and landed before His throne.

"He said, 'O Muḥammad! Approach the *ṣād* [discussed below]. Cleanse and purify the parts of your body that you prostrate with, and pray to your Lord.'

"So the Messenger of God came closer, as God—the blessed and exalted—had commanded, and performed ablutions thoroughly."

I [Isḥāq ibn ʿAmmār] said, "May I be your ransom, what is this *ṣād* that he was commanded to make ablutions from?"

He [Imām al-Kāẓim] said, "A fountain gushing forth from one of the pillars of the Throne. It is called the Water of Life. It is what God—the mighty and glorious—speaks of in *Ṣād. By the Qur'an, full of remembrance* (38:1)."

Author's comments: A narration telling of a river flowing from a leg of the throne has been related in *Maʿānī al-Akhbār* from Sufyān al-Thawrī from Imām al-Ṣādiq. In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is related from Ibn ʿAbbās that it [*Ṣād*] is one of the names of God; it also mentions that this is related from Imām al-Ṣādiq.

(4) Regarding the verse *they said, "Our Lord! Hasten for us our fate before the day of account"* (38:16), it is related in *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*, in a narration from al-Aṣbagh ibn ʿAlī, that Imām ʿAlī said:

This is their share of the Fire.

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Verses 17–29

The first set of verses tell of how the polytheists accused the Prophet of faking his genuine call [to God] in order to gain power. They felt that there was nothing special about him that entitled him but not themselves to receive the divine message or divine warning. They mocked the Day of Accounting and the very punishment that the Prophet was warning them of.

Here, God commands the Prophet to be patient: their mistakenness should not shake him or weaken in his resolve. Instead, he should remember God's servants who continually turned towards Him in the face of life's travails. In particular, these include nine prophets: David, Solomon, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Ishmael, Al-Yasaᶜ,[1] and Dhū al-Kifl. This section begins with David and mentions a few things about him.

اصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَاذْكُرْ عَبْدَنَا دَاوُودَ ذَا الْأَيْدِ ۖ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ ﴿١٧﴾

(38:17) ***Bear patiently what they say, and remember Our powerful*** **(dhā al-ayd)** ***servant David; he oft turned [to Allah]*** **(innahu awwāb).**

Ayd means "power". David glorified God so powerfully that the mountains and birds glorified God with him. David was also a powerful king, had robust knowledge, and was a fearsome warrior. He killed Goliath (Jālūt), as God tells of in Sūrah al-Baqarah.

Awwāb is an intensive form of *awb* ("returning", "going back"). It means here that he unceasingly turned to his Lord.

إِنَّا سَخَّرْنَا الْجِبَالَ مَعَهُ يُسَبِّحْنَ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِشْرَاقِ ﴿١٨﴾

(38:18) ***We made the mountains sing the glory [of Allah] with him*** **(maᶜahu yusabbiḥna)** ***at eventide and morn.***

The clearest reading of the text is that *with him* (maᶜahu) describes *sing the glory* (yusabbiḥna), and *sing the glory [of Allah] with him* is what

1 Possibly Elisha. [Trans.]

We made; that, God made the mountains sing the glory of God with him.

Typically, a prepositional phrase follows the verb it describes, not precedes it [that is, this would typically read *yasabbiḥna maʿahu*, not *maʿahu yusabbiḥna*]. The order of the words here expresses the idea that the mountains were imitating David's glorification of God.

In 21:79, the prepositional phrase comes after the verb, as is conventional:

> *And We made the mountains and birds sing praise with David* (sakhkharnā maʿa Dāwūd). (21:79)

Here, the placement of *with David* after the verb emphasizes God's hand in inspiring the mountains to glorify God with him.

The prepositional phrase occupies a different position in 34:10:

> *O mountains and birds! Turn [to Allah] with him (*maʿahu*)….* (34:10)

Eventide (ʿashī) and *morn* (ishrāq) mean "evening" and "morning", respectively.

***We made* (innā sakhkharnā):** The particle *innā* denotes an explanation. This verse and the succeeding verses outline what is meant by David being *powerful* **(dhā al-ayd)** in his glorification, kingdom, and knowledge, and how he was oft-turning to his Lord.

وَالطَّيْرَ مَحْشُورَةً ۖ كُلٌّ لَهُ أَوَّابٌ ﴿١٩﴾

(38:19) *And the birds flocked together* (maḥshūratan)—*all turning to Him.*

Maḥshūrah comes from the root *ḥ-sh-r* and means "assembling flurriedly". It means, "We made the birds congregate and sing praises with him."

***All turning to Him* (lahu):** This clause carries on from the sentence which said that the mountains and birds were glorifying God. It means that the mountains and birds ceaselessly turned towards God in their glorification; indeed, glorifying God is a sign of turning towards Him.

Possibly, *him* in *to him* (lahu) refers to David [rather than God], although that is unlikely.

God inspires the mountains and birds to glorify Him without David's efforts because all things glorify God:

> *All things glorify His praise; however, you do not understand their glorification.* (17:44)

However, [the mountains and birds are specified here] since their glorification was in unison with his, and since the people could actually hear them glorify God. What it means for all things to glorify God has been discussed in the exegesis of 17:44; it has also been explained that this means that all things actually glorify God; it is not merely as if they were glorifying God [that is, it is in the *lisān al-qāl* not the *lisān al-ḥāl*].

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وَشَدَدْنَا مُلْكَهُ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الْحِكْمَةَ وَفَصْلَ الْخِطَابِ ﴿٢٠﴾

(38:20) ***And We strengthened*** **(shadadnā)** ***his kingdom and gifted him wisdom*** **(ḥikmah)** ***and clear [understanding of] speech*** **(faṣl al-khiṭāb).**

Al-Rāghib says:

Shadd [shadadnā] means "tying something firm".

Here, "tying firm his kingdom" is a figure of speech meaning "bolstering his rule and judgment" through being formidable, having wealth and soldiers, administering soundly, and the other sorts of things that strengthen a king.

*Wisdom (*ḥikmah*)* originates from the root *ḥ-k-m* meaning "to discern the truth", "to adjudge". Here, it refers to correct, certain comprehension of what benefits the human being and his ascent to perfection. Some exegetes say that, here, it means "prophethood", and others say that it means "the Psalms and knowledge of the religious law." There are also other views. However, these views may all be dispensed with.

Clear [understanding of] speech (faṣl al-khiṭāb) is analyzing the words that a person speaks to another and distinguishing the truth from the falsehood in them. It is relevant to judging between two litigants.

Some exegetes say that *faṣl al-khiṭāb* means to speak concisely, neither verbosely nor curtly, so that the listener is neither bored nor uninformed. Others say that *faṣl al-khiṭāb* means saying the expression *ammā baʿad* ("as for what comes next") since David was the first person to use that expression. However, the next verse, which is about the two litigants, supports our interpretation.

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وَهَلْ أَتَاكَ نَبَأُ الْخَصْمِ إِذْ تَسَوَّرُوا الْمِحْرَابَ ﴿٢١﴾

(38:21) ***Has the story of the litigants*** **(khaṣm)** ***come to you? When they scaled [the walls]*** **(tasawwarū)** ***of the sanctuary.***

Khaṣm is the verbal noun of the root *kh-ṣ-m* ("disputing", "being inimical"); by it is meant people who have fallen into dispute. *Tasawwarū* means "to climb to the top of a high wall (*sūr*)", just as *tasannam* means "climbing atop a camel-hump (*sanām*)" and *tadharrī* means "climbing a mountain-peak (*dharwah*)".

Exegetes have explained *miḥrāb* as being an upstairs room or alcove. The rhetorical question *"Has the story…come to you?"* inspires curiosity at such an unusual thing and urges the audience to continue listening to the story. It means, "O Muḥammad! Have you heard the story of the disputing people who climbed the walls of David's sanctuary?"

إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَىٰ دَاوُودَ فَفَزِعَ مِنْهُمْ ۖ قَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ ۖ خَصْمَانِ بَغَىٰ بَعْضُنَا عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ فَاحْكُمْ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تُشْطِطْ وَاهْدِنَا إِلَىٰ سَوَاءِ الصِّرَاطِ ﴿٢٢﴾

(38:22) ***When* (idh)** ***they came to David, and he was alarmed at them. They said, "Fear not! [We are] two disputers; one of us has wronged the other, so judge between us in truth. Be not unjust, and guide us to the right path."***

The adverb *idh* ("when") describes *tasawwarū*, just as the previous occurrence of *idh* described the story of the litigants. It means that they did not come to David in his sanctuary the normal way; rather, they hopped over the walls and barged in without permission, and this alarmed him.

***He was alarmed at them* (fa-fazaʿa minhum):** Al-Rāghib says:

> *Fazaʿa* means "to shrink back in terror" and "to abhor a fearsome thing". The verb *fazaʿa* is similar in type to the verb *jazaʿa* ("to be anxious about", "to be unhappy about"). The verb *fazaʿa* cannot be used for God; that is, one does not say "I shrunk back in terror from God (*fazaʿtu min Allāh*) in the same what that may say "I feared God (*khiftu minhu*)."

It has previously been explained that *khashyah* (fear, awe) arises in the heart after it is disturbed and discomfited. *Khashyah* is a blameworthy emotion, unless it is vis-à-vis God. For that reason, the prophets fear (or are awestruck at) none other than God:

> *They fear* [yakhshawn, from khashyah] *none but Allah*. (33:39)

Khawf (fear, dread) arises in the heart upon encountering something abominable or hateful. It spurs a person to guard himself against evil and

to defend against this unwanted thing. Unlike *khashyah*, which is linked to what one comprehends, *khawf* is linked to taking action ensuing an unpleasant matter. As such, *khawf* is not blameworthy in and of itself. Rather, it is good, for it impels a person to take appropriate precautions. As God says to His Messenger:

> *And if you fear* [takhāfanna, from khawf] *treachery from a group*…. (8:58)

Since *faz*ᶜ denotes drawing away from or abhorring a fearsome thing, it too occupies the realm of act, not sense. Therefore, *faz*ᶜ in and of itself is not a blameworthy reaction; rather, it is a praiseworthy one, insofar as it aids a person in determining a threat which needs to be protected against. Therefore, there is no harm in saying that David experienced *faz*ᶜ even though he was a prophet, and prophets fear none but God.

They said, "Fear not!": When they saw that they had startled David, they wanted to calm and reassure him, so they said "*fear not*"—allaying alarm by allaying its root cause, which is fear.

[We are] two disputers; one of us has wronged the other: Meaning, "We are two disputing sides; one of us has wronged the other."

"So judge between us in truth. Be not unjust* (wa lā tushṭiṭ)*": *Tushṭiṭ* means "to be unjust" or "to be tyrannical". It means, "Judge between us in accordance with the truth, and do not be tyrannical or unjust in your judgment. Guide us to a fair balance in this matter."

إِنَّ هَٰذَا أَخِي لَهُ تِسْعٌ وَتِسْعُونَ نَعْجَةً وَلِيَ نَعْجَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَقَالَ أَكْفِلْنِيهَا
وَعَزَّنِي فِي الْخِطَابِ ﴿٢٣﴾

> **(38:23)** ***"This here is my brother; he has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe. However, he told me, 'Put her in my care,' and he overpowered me in speech."***

This elaborates on what their dispute was about. "*This here is my brother*" is said by one of the disputants referring to a member of the other side, who was his brother.

Some exegetes have put forward this verse as proof that the smallest number that may take a plural form is two [instead of three, as is more common]. They argue this on the ground that *they* (pl.) *scaled the walls* and *they* (pl.) *came to David* are in the plural form. However, *two disputers* is in the dual form; *this here is my brother* also implies that there were two.

However, keeping the above in mind, it is clear that this view is incorrect, for it is possible for there to be multiple individuals on each of the two sides, as in:

> *These two adversaries dispute about their* (pl.) *Lord; and as for those who reject…* (22:19).

It is possible that the dispute was initially between two individuals; however, then others took one side or the other and backed his claim.

"He has ninety-nine ewes* (naʿjah)*, and I have one ewe. However, he told me, 'Put her in my care,' and he overpowered me in speech": A *naʿjah* is a female sheep. *Put her in my care* (akfilnīhā) means "put her under my custodianship and authority". *Overpowered me in speech* means "he won out over me". The rest is clear.

قَالَ لَقَدْ ظَلَمَكَ بِسُؤَالِ نَعْجَتِكَ إِلَىٰ نِعَاجِهِ ۖ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنَ الْخُلَطَاءِ لَيَبْغِي بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَقَلِيلٌ مَا هُمْ ۗ وَظَنَّ دَاوُودُ أَنَّمَا فَتَنَّاهُ فَاسْتَغْفَرَ رَبَّهُ وَخَرَّ رَاكِعًا وَأَنَابَ ۩ ﴿٢٤﴾

(38:24) ***He [David] said, "He has been unjust to you in asking you to [add] your lone ewe to his ewes. Partners often transgress against each other, unless they believe and act righteously. But how few are they!" And David realized that they had tested him, and he sought forgiveness from his Lord and fell bowing and repenting.***

This is David's reply. Perhaps he pronounced judgment before hearing both sides. Possibly, the owner of the 99 sheep may have had a right to the single sheep and hence had requested it from the other person. However, the owner of the lone sheep spoke emotionally in a way that aroused his sense of mercy and sympathy. Therefore, he [David] hastened to this estimation of the situation, and said, "*He has been unjust to you in asking you to [add] your lone ewe to his ewes.*"

The *lām* (in *laqad*) is for swearing an oath. According to exegetes, the verse implies that what he was asking as to add his ewe to his [otherwise, the verse literally reads, "He has been unjust to you in asking your sheep to his sheep"], and this is considered a second object of the preposition *ilā* ("to"). Therefore, the meaning of this verse is, "I swear, he has wronged you in asking you to add your sheep to his."

"Partners often transgress against each other, unless they believe and

act righteously. But how few are they!": This concludes what David is saying and clarifies what he first said. *Khulaṭāʾ* are partners or associates who blend their wealth.

***And David realized* (ẓanna) *that they had tested him* (fatannāhu), *and he sought forgiveness from his Lord and fell bowing and repenting* (wa kharra rākiʿan wa anāb):** Meaning that David recognized that they had tested him with this event, meaning that they had been a trial for him; *fitnah* [from which the verb *fatannāhu* arises] means "test" or "trial".

Some exegetes say that *ẓanna* here takes on its conventional meaning; that is, it is to think something but not to be fully certain, or to suspect something. However, the fact that he repents and seeks forgiveness suggest that he knew (not merely suspected) that it had been a test; otherwise, he would have been repenting and seeking forgiveness over something he was unsure about. So, *ẓanna* should have the meaning of "he knew".

According to al-Rāghib, *kharra* means for something to fall down in such a way that it makes the sound known as *kharīr*; *kharīr* is the sound that water, wind, and other things when they fall from high. *Rukuʿ* means "bowing".

***Repenting* (anāb):** According to al-Rāghib, this means "returning to Him in repentance and with sincerity of deeds". It is from the verb root *n-w-b* meaning "a thing returning again and again".

It means: "And David knew that this happenstance was a test which he had been tested with, and that he had erred, so he sought forgiveness from His Lord over what had transpired from him, and fell bowing and repented to Him."

In accordance with what has been narrated about this story, most exegetes hold that the litigants were angels whom God sent to him to try him; the situation of these narrations will be discussed later.

However, the details of the story all support the idea they were angels who had taken form; the details being: their entering his sanctuary in an atypical way, to the point that they alarmed him; his realization that they had been a divine test for him and not a usual happenstance; and the next verse, which reads *judge between the people in truth, and do not follow your whims* (38:26), which indicates that they were a divine trial to make him alert and strengthen his rule and judgment among the people.

With this in mind, [it is highly likely that] all of this (including the request for the sheep, and David's saying *"he has been unjust to you"*) occurred as a dream or vision which the angels manifested in, not on the

physical plane. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that a person does not bear religious responsibility [for their actions; in this case, for passing judgment] in a vision or dream. Religious responsibility only applies to the material, visible realm. This did not happen physically—that is, there were no physical litigants, and no real sheep, neither a single sheep nor the 99 sheep; rather, these were only things that were manifested to him. Therefore, David's slip in this case occurred with respect to something that appeared to him in a circumstance where he had no formal religious responsibility. This is similar to the slip of Adam, who ate from the tree in the garden before falling to earth, which is the place where shariʿah and religious responsibility are ordained. David's repentance and prayer for forgiveness are similar to Adam's. Furthermore, God clearly deems David a caliph (38:26), just as he deems Adam a caliph [2:30]. This has been explained more in the exegesis of the story of Adam in Sūrah al-Baqarah in volume 1 of this work [Arabic edition].

That being said, some exegetes do hold that the two litigants who barged in were human beings, and the situation was as described. In this case, "*he has been unjust to you*" is taken as a judgment evaluating the situation, along the lines of, "You have been wronged, unless he brought proof as to why he should have the sheep." This is in order to adhere to what the intellect and narrations necessitate—namely, that the prophets are protected by God from error. Therefore, it is not possible for them to commit either major or minor sins.

Furthermore, insofar as God had just declared that He gave David solid judgment and clear [understanding of] speech, it would be contradictory for David to then err in judgment.

فَغَفَرْنَا لَهُ ذَٰلِكَ ۖ وَإِنَّ لَهُ عِنْدَنَا لَزُلْفَىٰ وَحُسْنَ مَآبٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

(38:25) *So We forgave him that. He had a near place* (zulfā) *to Us and a beautiful return* (maʾāb).

Zulfah and *zulfā* connote a station and prestige. *Maʾāb* means "return". *Zulfā* and *maʾāb* are indefinite to connote a sense of grandeur. The rest of the verse is clear.

يَا دَاوُودُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ فَاحْكُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَىٰ فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَضِلُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ بِمَا نَسُوا يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ ﴿٢٦﴾

(38:26) ***O David! We have made you a caliph* (khalīfah) *on the earth, so judge between the people in truth, and do not follow your whims, lest they divert you from the path of Allah. Those who stray from the path of Allah shall have a severe torment, for they forgot the Day of Accounting.***

The readiest interpretation of the verse is that these words are being spoken to David in the context of "So We forgave David, and said this to him."

The readiest interpretation of *caliph* here is that it refers to being a divinely appointed authority (*khilāfah*), in accordance with *And when your Lord said to the angels: "I am placing a caliph on the earth"* (2:30). One feature of caliphate [*khīlafah*, which comes from the root meaning "to succeed"] is that a succeeding caliph mimics his successor in his attributes and acts. Therefore, the caliph of God on earth must conduct himself in a godly manner, intending and doing what God intends, decrees, and destines. He must judge and rule as God has decreed (and God adjudges rightly!), and must tread the path of God, not transgress it.

For this reason, *so judge between the people in truth* is linked to *We have made you a caliph on earth* with the conjunction *so* (fa-). This indicates that the intent here is to say that God made David a caliph in actuality, not just potentiality. That is, it is not just an honorific title; rather, God caused David's rule to grow to fruition in the necessary aspects and granted him reign whereby he would judge between the people.

Some exegetes say that *We have made you a caliph* is saying that he succeeded the prophets who came before him; therefore, *We have made you a caliph* is linked to *so judge between the people in truth* by the conjunction *so* (fa-) because being a successor to a prophet is an enormous blessing which is fitting to be thankful for, and one demonstrates thankfulness for it by being just. Alternatively, it is said that it is because the role of passing judgment is one of the offices which a caliph passes to his successor, whether a caliph judges justly or not, and so *judging* is qualified by *in truth* to emphasise that he should do so correctly. However, these interpretations require some finagling to arrive at and are unsupported by the actual text.

Do not follow your whims, lest they divert you from the path of Allah: This is appended to the previous clause by *and*; the way it is placed

face-to-face with the previous clauses gives the sense that it means: "And when judging, do not follow your whims, lest they deviate you from the truth, which is the path of God." This verse supports the idea that the path of God is Truth (*al-ḥaqq*).

Some exegetes say that *judge… in truth* and *do not follow your whims* is not actually intended to be addressed to David but is actually meant for anyone who has authority over people to hear. Therefore, this verse advises authority figures in general to judge justly and disavow falsehood. This is because David was sinless and would only have judged truly and justly and would not have followed falsehood anyway.

However, there are some problems with the interpretation. For although it is true that commanding him is also a warning to others, the infallibility of the infallible and the fact that he does not rule but justly does not prevent the assignment of command and prohibition to him. For sinlessness (*ʿiṣmah*) does not remove a person's free will. And as long as their choice remains, it is permissible and even obligatory to direct commands and prohibitions (*taklīf*) to them as it is directed to other people. This is because if the *taklīf* was not directed to the infallibles, there would be no meaning for obligation or prohibition with regards to them, and no difference between obedience and disobedience, so the meaning of infallibility, which is protection from disobedience, would have been void.

Those who stray from the path of Allah shall have a severe torment, for they forgot the Day of Accounting: This gives a reason for prohibiting following whims—because it goes hand-in-hand with forgetting the Day of Accounting, and forgetting it leads to a severe punishment. "Forgetting" here means "not being vigilant about it".

This verse indicates that all ways in which people stray from the path of God through some form of disobedience are inseparable from forgetting the Day of Accounting.

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا بَاطِلًا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ظَنُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۚ
فَوَيْلٌ لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنَ النَّارِ ﴿٢٧﴾

(38:27) ***And We did not create the heaven and earth and what is between them in vain; that is what the deniers think. Alas for the deniers, and the fire!***

The previous verse spoke of the Day of Resurrection. This follows from

it and is connected it with the conjunction *and* to offer two arguments for the reality of Day of Resurrection.

The first argument is in *And We did not create the heaven and earth and what is between them in vain*. This is an argument grounded in an end goal (*min ṭarīq al-ghāyāt*). If the creation of the heavens and earth and everything between them—and these things are created and transient; they come and go—was not for the sake of a fixed, eternal, intransient goal, it would have been in vain (*bāṭil*). And, by definition, a thing which is in vain (*bāṭil*) has no inherent goal; it cannot be realized in the real world.

However, it would not be possible for a wise God to do this, and there is no doubt in God's wisdom.

Possibly, *in vain* (bāṭil) is meant in a general sense, to mean "playing around". Were this the intended meaning here, this verse would be similar to the following verse:

> *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them for amusement. We create them in truth.* (44:39)

Some exegetes hold that the verse is linked to the previous verse by *and* to give the message: "Do not follow your whims, for it leads you astray, and because God did not create the world for following whims. That is falsehood [or vain plain]. No, He created it for His oneness (*tawḥīd*) and for following the divine law."

However, this interpretation is not in harmony with this verse:

> *Shall we treat those who believe and act righteously like those who cause corruption on the earth? Or shall we treat the reverent like the wicked?* (33:28)

That is what the deniers think. Alas for the deniers, and the fire! Meaning, "[They think that] He created the world in vain with no purpose, and that there is no Day of Accounting on which the end result of all matters shall be made clear. This is what the deniers imagine about the Resurrection. So woe betide them due to the punishment of the Fire!"

أَمْ نَجْعَلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَالْمُفْسِدِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَمْ نَجْعَلُ الْمُتَّقِينَ كَالْفُجَّارِ ﴿٢٨﴾

(38:28) *Shall we treat those who believe and act righteously like those who cause corruption on the earth? Or shall we treat the reverent like the wicked?*

This is the second argument for the Resurrection. It establishes that the human being, like other created beings, must grow to perfection [rather than being created unchanging and already perfected]. The perfection of the human lies in his journey from potentiality to actuality in the arenas of knowledge and deed. For the unblemished inner instinct (*al-fiṭrah al-ṣaḥīḥah*) guides a person to two things: belief in the truth, and acting righteously. These are also the two things that rectify human societies on earth.

Those who believe and act righteously are the reverent (*muttaqūn*); they are the perfected human beings. Those who cause corruption (*al-mufsidūn*) in the earth—due so through their corrupt beliefs and deeds. They are the wicked (*fujjār*). They are the imperfect and the losers; they fall short in the measure of true humanity. As a corollary, this perfection or imperfection is necessarily tied in with leading a goodly life with a wholesome livelihood, or otherwise.

None contest that this worldly life, which they both share, operates under the laws of cause and effect and material agency. It operates equally on everyone—believer or disbeliever, perfect or imperfect. When someone works hard, and their efforts are backed up by the necessary material factors [for instance, sowing a rich field and caring for the crops properly], that person will succeed and live handsomely. Whoever does otherwise will live wretchedly.

Were the totality of life to be confined to the worldly life, which is equally shared by both groups [the virtuous and the wicked] with no difference, and there were no further phase of existence that would distinguish the two groups and which would be suitable for their condition, this would go against God's solicitousness towards fulfilling anyone's [lost] rights and justly looking after people's rightful claims.

If you please, you could even say that treating these two groups [the virtuous and the wicked] equally, and ignoring what either deserves, would be against divine justice itself.[1]

The verse—as you see—does not deny that believers and disbelievers are in the same situation;[2] however, it contrasts those who believe and

1 Note that the first argument is *burhānī* (rational) and the second is *jadalī* (dialectical; that is, interrogating whether a claim or line or argument is valid or invalid without consideration of whether it is actually true).

2 For instance, in similar circumstances in their worldly lives, or both being

act righteously with those who do not (whether they be believers who do not act righteously, or otherwise). Then it presents a second comparison: between the reverent and the wicked.

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٢٩﴾

(38:29) ***A Book, We have revealed to you, blessed, so that they may ponder its signs and verses, and so that those with understanding may reflect.***

This verse describes the Book. It also indicates that it was sent down once, as a whole, before its gradual revelation. This is because the command to *ponder* and *reflect* on it implies that it have been available as a complete book to ponder and reflect on, not merely as scattered leaves.

The juxtaposition between *so that they may ponder* and *those with understanding may reflect* implies that the pronoun *they* refers to all human beings.

It means: "We sent this book to you. It overflows with goodness and blessings for all people, but especially for those people who reflect upon it and are thereby guided by it." Alternatively, "It provides conclusive proof for those with understanding; when they reflect upon the arguments and evidence it presents, they are guided to the truth."

Examining Narrations

(1) The story of the disputants coming to David. This is related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*,[1] with some differences between the various narrations. Al-Qummī relates something similar in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. It is also mentioned in *al-ʿArāʾis* and elsewhere, and is summarized in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* as follows:
David used to pray often. Once, he said, "O Lord, you elevated Abraham by making Him your confidante (*khalīl*), and You elevated Moses by speaking to him."
He [God] said, "O David! We tested them in a way that We have not tested you. If you wish, I shall test you."
He [David] said, "Yes, O Lord, test me."

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subject to divine judgment. [Trans.]

1 It is related from Anas, from Mujāhid and al-Siddī, and through various chains from Ibn ʿAbbās.

> And so, one day, when he was in his prayer-niche (*miḥrāb*), a dove alighted. Trying to catch it, he climbed out the window, when he saw the wife of Ūrīyā ibn Ḥannān [Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite] bathing. As soon as he saw her, he wanted her and resolved to marry her.
>
> So he sent Ūriyā on some military expeditions and ordered that he be sent forward to the front of the chest (*tābut*) which held the Ark of the Covenant (*sakīnah*) [which was carried at the forefront of battle]. This was done, and he was killed. Then, when her waiting period (*ʿiddah*) had finished, he married her and sired a child by her; that child was Solomon.
>
> That day, he was again in his prayer-niche, when two men appeared. He was startled by them, but they said, "Fear not; we are two disputants. One of us has wronged the other…." The conversation ensued as it does in the Qur'an.
>
> Then one of the disputants looked at the other and laughed. That made David realize that they were actually two angels whom God had sent to him in the form of litigants to alert him to his mistake. So he repented and cried until foliage sprung up from his copious tears.
>
> Then *Majʿma al-Bayān* says most aptly:
>
> There is no doubt that such an act is corrupt. An ordinary person who did this would no longer be considered just, and their testimony would no longer be accepted in court. So how is it possible that this could be done by a prophet of God, given that God has trusted the prophets with His revelation and has made them His emissaries to His creation? One's very ears recoil from such a thing!

Author's comments: This story has been taken from the Torah. In fact, the Torah vilifies David even worse, so it has been somehow modified here as will transpire for you.

In short, the Torah says that, one evening, David rose from his throne and took a stroll along the palace rooftop. There, he beheld an exquisitely beautiful woman bathing. David sent a messenger to inquire about her, and he was told that she resembles the wife of Ūriyā al-Ḥittī (Uriah the Hittite). So David sent a messenger to bring her to him. She came to him, and he lay with her; at this time, she was not on her monthly period. After she returned home, she realised that she had fallen pregnant, and so she

sent a message to David informing him of this.

At that time, Ūriyā was in David's army and was off fighting the Banī ʿAmūn [the Ammonites]. So David wrote to Yuāb [Joab], the commander of his army, and ordered him to send Ūriyā to him. Ūriyā arrived at David's palace and spent some days there.[1] Then, David wrote a missive to Yuāb, placed it in Ūriyā's hands, and ordered Ūriyā to deliver it to Yuāb. The letter said: "Situate Ūriyā in the midst of the heaviest fighting, and call back the reinforcements from around him, so that he is struck and dies." This was done. Ūriyā was killed, and David was told.

When Ūriyā's wife found out that her husband had died, she lamented him. After the time for mourning had passed, David sent for her, brought her to his house, and made her one of his wives. She bore him a son. However, David's act was displeasing to the eyes of his Lord.

So the Lord sent the prophet Nāthān to David. Nāthān came to David and said to him, "There were two men in a city, one rich and the other poor. The rich one had many sheep and cows, but the poor man only had one little ewe which he had managed to acquire and which he tended to. A guest came to the rich man, but the rich man refused to give up any of his own sheep or cows to feed the guest. Instead, he took the ewe from this poor man and used it to feed the guest."

David was enraged about what had happened to the man. He said to Nāthān, "By our living Lord! The man who did this should be killed, and four ewes given back to the poor man! For that rich man did this with no pity."

Nāthān said to David, "But you are that man, and your Lord is censuring you. He says: 'I shall afflict your household with evil, and I shall take your women from you before your very eyes. I shall give them to someone near you, who shall lie with them before all of the Israelites, and in broad daylight, as a recompense for what you did to Ūriyā and his wife.'"

David said to Nāthān, "I have erred before my Lord."

Nāthān said to David, "Your Lord has absolved your sin. You are not going to die; however, you have made the enemies of the Lord gloat over your act. So the son who has been born to you from this woman shall die."

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1 In the Biblical story, David tells Ūriyā to spend some time at home with his wife, but Ūriyā refuses to lay with her because it was customary for soldiers to abstain from spousal relationships before battle, and Ūriyā was a dedicated soldier. [Trans.]

And the child fell ill for seven days and then died. Then Ūriyā's wife bore another son to David, and that was Solomon.[1]

(2) In *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, in the section on the discussion between [Imām] al-Riḍa and leaders of different creeds and doctrines (*maqālāt*) that was held before [the caliph] Maʾmūn, it is related: [Imām] al-Riḍa said to Ibn Jahm: "As for David, what do you say about him?

He said, "It is said that David was praying in his prayer-niche, when Iblīs took the form of a handsome bird, unlike any other bird that had been before. So David cut short his prayer and chased after the bird to catch it. It flew up to the roof, and so David followed it. Then it landed on the house of Ūriyā ibn Ḥayyān. When David went after it, he saw the wife of Ūriyā bathing. When his eyes fell upon her, he wanted her. David had already sent Ūriyā to war, and so he wrote to his commander and told him to send Ūriyā out near the chest (*tābūt*] [that held the Ark of the Covenant; that is, in the thick of battle]. This was done, and Ūriyā was victorious. This weighed heavily on David, and so he wrote to his commander a second time and told him to send Ūriyā again out near the chest (*tābūt*). This was done. This time, Ūriyā was slain, and David married his widow."

[Imām] al-Riḍa struck his forehead with his hand and said, "*From Allah we come, and to Allah we return* (2:156)! You are accusing a prophet of God of taking his prayers so lightly that he would abandon them to chase after a bird… and indecency… and murder?"

He [Ibn Jahm] said, "O son of the Messenger of God, then what was [David's] error?"

He [Imām Riḍa] said, "Woe be upon you! David suspected that God had not created any creation wiser than himself. So God—the Mighty and Glorious—sent him two angels, who took human form in his prayer-niche. They said, '*[We are] two disputers; one of us has wronged the other, so judge between us in truth. Be not unjust, and guide us to the right path. This here is my brother; he has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe However, he told me, "Put her in my care," and he overpowered me in speech*' (38:22–23). So

1 This summary is taken from 2 Samuel 11–12.

David hastened in his judgment and said, '*He has been unjust to you in asking you to [add] your lone ewe to his ewes*' (37:24) without first asking the plaintiff to present his evidence or for his side of the story. This was David's slip. It was about judging, not what you have made it out to be. Have you not heard God—the Mighty and Glorious—saying, '*O David! We have made you a caliph on the earth, so judge between the people in truth, and do not follow your whims*' (37:26)?"

Ibn Jahm said, "O son of the Messenger of God. Then what about the story of him and Ūriyā?"

[Imām] al-Riḍa said, "In David's time, a woman whose husband died or was killed did not remarry, ever. David was the first person whom God—the Mighty and Glorious—allowed to marry a widow. Therefore, he married Ūriyā's wife after Ūriyā had been killed and her waiting-period finished. This is what upset the people [and led to rumours] after Ūriyā was killed."

(3) In *Amāli al-Ṣadūq*, with a chain of narration leading to Imām al-Ṣadiq, it says that Imām al-Ṣādiq said to ʿAlqamah:

You can never make people happy; you can never curb their tongues. Did they not accuse David of chasing a bird until he saw the wife of Ūriyā and lusted after her? And did they not accuse him of sending her husband into the thick of the battle [lit. "in front of the chest" which held the Ark of the Covenant] so that he would be killed, and then marrying her?

On the Story of David

The Qur'anic story: The Qur'an only contains allusions to his story. God mentions that he was in the army of Ṭālūt [King Saul] when it fought Jālūt [Goliath]. David fought [and killed Goliath], and God made him the king after Ṭālūt. God gifted David with wisdom and knowledge as He willed (2:251), He made him his caliph (*khalīfah*, divine representative), had him judge between the people, and granted him an acute understanding of speech (37:20; 37:26). God strengthened David's kingdom, compelled the mountains and birds to glorify God with him (21:79; 37:18–19), and softened iron for him so that he could fashion armor from it (21:80; 34:11).

The Qur'ans praise of David: God includes David in lists of prophets whom He praises (6:84–87), and praises him as he praises them, in

addition to saying some special words about him. God gave David the Psalms (4:163). God granted him honor and knowledge (34:10; 27:15). God granted him wisdom and an acute understanding of speech, and made him a caliph on earth (37:20; 37:26). He describes him as oft-turning [to his Lord] and as having a *near place with Us* and *a beautiful return* (37:19; 37:25).

The litigants: The Qur'anic story of the litigants coming to David only indicate that their appearance was a test from God. They took human form to offer him divine guidance and to teach him how to judge—and that he should neither oppress either side, nor swerve from justice and balance [between the two parties].

Most of the narrations speak of the story of Ūriyā and his wife. However, the prophets are above such conduct, as discussed in the explanation of the verses and narrations.

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Verses 30–40

This is the second story telling of the servants of God who turned often towards Him, and which enjoin the Prophet to be patient and keep them in mind.

وَوَهَبْنَا لِدَاوُودَ سُلَيْمَانَ ۚ نِعْمَ الْعَبْدُ ۖ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ ﴿٣٠﴾

(38:30) ***And We bestowed Solomon upon David. What an excellent servant! He often turned [to Us].***

Meaning, God gave Solomon to David as a son. The rest of the verse is clear, in light of what was mentioned previously.

إِذْ عُرِضَ عَلَيْهِ بِالْعَشِيِّ الصَّافِنَاتُ الْجِيَادُ ﴿٣١﴾

(38:31) ***When noble swift-running steeds*** **(al-ṣāfināt al-jiyād)** ***were displayed to him near eventide*** **(bil-ʿashiyy).**

ʿAshiyy ("eventide") is the opposite of *ghadāh* ("morning") and refers to the latter part of the day, after midday.

According to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, *ṣāfināt* and *jiyād* mean:

Ṣāfināt is the plural of *ṣāfinah*. It is used for a horse that is standing on three legs, with one hoof raised.

Jiyād is the plural of *jawād* ("horse"). It comes from the root *j-w-d* ("to be generous", "to rain", "to race"); in the plural form, the *y* takes the place of the *w*. It speaks of swift steeds, fleet of foot, racing along (*tajūd*).

فَقَالَ إِنِّي أَحْبَبْتُ حُبَّ الْخَيْرِ عَنْ ذِكْرِ رَبِّي حَتَّىٰ تَوَارَتْ بِالْحِجَابِ ﴿٣٢﴾

(38:32) ***He said, "I loved the good things*** **(aḥbabtu ḥubb al-khayr)**[1] ***more than the remembrance of my Lord." Then, it [the sun] was hidden in the veil [of night].***

The pronouns "he" and "I" refer to Solomon. According to exegetes, *good things* (*khayr*) refers to the horses, since the Arabs used to refer to

1 Lit. "I loved the love of good things."

horses as *khayr*. For instance, this expression is used in a narration from the Prophet: "Good will remain on the foreheads of horses until the Day of Resurrection."[1] However, some exegetes take *khayr* to mean "immense wealth". The Qur'an uses *khayr* to mean "immense wealth" elsewhere; for instance, in *if you leave behind wealth…* (2:180).

"I loved" (*aḥbabtu*) means "I preferred", and the preposition *ʿan* is used to mean "to prefer one thing over another," similar to how the preposition *ʿalā* is often used. It means, "I preferred these horses to the remembrance of my Lord—that is, prayer, although I also love prayer. Therefore, when the horses were paraded before me, I became engrossed in them and neglected to say my prayers, until the sun set."

Then, it [the sun] was hidden in the veil [of night]: According to exegetes, *it* refers to the sun. *Hidden in the veil* means that it set and was veiled by the horizon. This understanding is reinforced by the word *eventide* (ʿashiyy) in the previous verse; otherwise, there would be no clear textual evidence for it.

Overall, the verse means: "When the horses were paraded before me, I was engrossed in them and neglected my prayer, until the prayer-time elapsed at sunset. I loved these horses for the sake of God, since they could be readied for jihad in the way of God. Thus, attending to them was an act of worship; and one form of worship distracted me from another—namely, the prayer, even though the prayer is more important."

Some exegetes hold that *it was hidden* actually refers to the horses. That is, he ordered the horses to be paraded before him, and he became preoccupied with them until they disappeared from view, and were hidden behind the veil of distance. However, while the word *eventide* in the previous verse supports the previous view, there is no textual evidence for the view that Solomon commanded that the horses [instead of the sun] to be brought back, either in the Qur'an or narrations.

رُدُّوهَا عَلَيَّ ۖ فَطَفِقَ مَسْحًا بِالسُّوقِ وَالْأَعْنَاقِ ﴿٣٣﴾

(34:33) *He said, "Bring it back to me." Then they wiped their legs and necks [for ablutions].*

Some exegetes say that the pronoun *it* refers to the sun, meaning that

1 Narrated in *Ṣaḥīh Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīh Muslim*. The narration uses both the words *khayr* and *khayl*, and seems to refer to battle-horses.

he commanded the angels to reverse the course of the Sun so that he could pray on time. Then, the next sentence means that he began to wipe his legs and neck for ablutions, and told those around him to do the same. Then they all prayed. This interpretation has been related in some narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt.

Some exegetes also say that *it* refers to the horses; that is, he commanded that the horses be brought back before him. Then he began to stroke their legs and necks, to dedicate them to the way of God, as a way of making up for how he had been distracted from his prayers.

Others say that the pronoun *it* refers to the horses, and by "wiping" their necks and legs, it means he struck them with his sword and severed them, since he was angry at them for distracting him from the remembrance of God. Therefore, he ordered that they be brought back so he could cleave their necks and legs with his sword, and killed them all. However, such an act would not be befitting of the status of the prophets at all, for what sin did the horses commit? It was not their fault that he looked at them so long that he missed his prayers. They would not deserve this sort of horrendous punishment. Additionally, the horses were likely someone's property, and so this would be despoiling someone else's property.

Some exegetes argue for this view on the basis of a narration ascribed to the Prophet from Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, which says that this expression means that he severed their legs and necks with the sword. Then they explain that this was done as a sacrifice to God, since sacrificing horses was part of their religious practice. However, this is baseless; no narrations—neither from Ubayy, nor from anyone else—say that they used to sacrifice horses.

Furthermore, Solomon was not distracted wantonly; rather, one form of worship distracted him from another, as mentioned previously. With that in mind, the first view agrees best with the text; if not that, then the second.

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا سُلَيْمَانَ وَأَلْقَيْنَا عَلَىٰ كُرْسِيِّهِ جَسَدًا ثُمَّ أَنَابَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(38:34) ***We tried Solomon and placed a lifeless body*** **(jasadan)** ***on his throne. Then He turned [to Us].***

A *jasad* is a body with no soul.

According to exegetes, the lifeless body that was draped limply over Solomon's throne was Solomon himself. He had fallen gravely ill, as a test from God, and was slumped over his throne as if he were a corpse, due

to his severe illness.

However, there are some problems with this interpretation. First, a pronoun is missing. Second, it requires *We placed him* (alqaynāhu) to be interpreted non-literally [that is, inherently, the expression conveys the sense that someone else's body was placed on the throne, not that Solomon slumped over it]. This choppy, ineloquent expression would not be acceptable.

Other exegetes have put forward other views about what the verse means; these are in accordance with different narrations about it. The most suitable of these interpretations is that the body was that of a young boy: God had taken his soul and made his body slump against the throne. From *Then he turned [to Us]. He said, "O Lord, forgive me"*, it is understood that this boy had been Solomon's son, and Solomon had placed his hopes in him, that he would be suitable for the way of God. So God took his soul and left the boy upon the throne to remind Solomon to always place matters in God's hands.

قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَهَبْ لِي مُلْكًا لَا يَنْبَغِي لِأَحَدٍ مِنْ بَعْدِي ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ ﴿٣٥﴾

(38:35) *He said, "O Lord, forgive me, and grant me a kingdom like none shall have after me. You are the bestower!"*

Solomon's words seemingly relate to what happened in the previous verse; that is, he said that after the body was cast onto the throne. This does not begin with the conjunction *wāw* ("and") so that it follows smoothly in a question-answer paradigm. That is, it is as if someone were to ask, "What did Solomon say when he turned to God?" and the answer was, "*He said, 'O Lord, forgive me….*"

Some people might take umbrage at Solomon's request—"*grant me a kingdom like none shall have after me*"—on the grounds that it seems miserly or stingy, since he is asking for a type of kingdom that no one else will ever have, anywhere, anytime. However, this discomfort is easily allayed by observing that he is asking for his own special, unique type of kingdom; he is not asking for it to be taken away from anyone else or that no one could ask for a special sort of kingdom.

فَسَخَّرْنَا لَهُ الرِّيحَ تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ رُخَاءً حَيْثُ أَصَابَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(38:36) ***So We subjected the winds to him, blowing pliantly*** **(rukhāʾ)** ***at his command, wherever he pleased.***

This is the response to his request. It tells us that his prayer as answered, and explains what kind of kingdom he was given—one that would never be given to someone after him; namely, dominion over the winds and the jinn.

Rukhāʾ means "softly", "pliantly", or "yieldingly". Here, it is used as an adverb, meaning that the winds would breeze along compliantly at his command, towards wherever he wished. It is not saying that the winds themselves were soft (*rukhāʾ*), since this would conflict with their description in *And Solomon had the gusting winds, blowing pliantly at his command* (21:81), which describes the winds as "gusting" or "tempestuous" (*ʿāṣifah*)—although one might argue that God made some of the winds tame and others tempestuous, in accordance with Solomon's wishes.

Wherever he pleased—meaning, wherever Solomon directed them; this conjoins with the verb *blowing*.

وَالشَّيَاطِينَ كُلَّ بَنَّاءٍ وَغَوَّاصٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

(38:37) ***As well as the malevolent spirits—the builders and the divers.***

Meaning, "We gave Solomon control over the malevolent spirits (*shayāṭīn*)—that is, the land-jinn who built things, and the sea-jinn who worked in the sea, and extracted pearls and the like."

وَآخَرِينَ مُقَرَّنِينَ فِي الْأَصْفَادِ ﴿٣٨﴾

(38:38) ***And others fettered in chains.***

Aṣfād is the plural of *ṣafad*, meaning "an iron shackle." It means, "We gave him control over other jinn who were joined in shackles, bound in chains."

هَٰذَا عَطَاؤُنَا فَامْنُنْ أَوْ أَمْسِكْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٣٩﴾

(38:39) ***This is Our gift. Give it freely or withhold it, without reckoning.***

Meaning, "This kingdom is Our exclusive gift to you. We do not require

anything in return." *Without reckoning* seemingly means "endless"; that is, should Solomon give of it, it would not diminish. This is why it says *give freely or withhold it*; both options are the same, in that, either way, it will have no impact on his kingdom.

Some exegetes hold that *without reckoning* means that he will not be held accountable for it on the Day of Resurrection. Others say that it means he should give without expecting anything in return. There are also other views.

وَإِنَّ لَهُ عِنْدَنَا لَزُلْفَىٰ وَحُسْنَ مَآبٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

(38:40) ***He enjoyed nearness to Us and an excellent return.***

This has already been discussed.

Examining Narrations

(1) Regarding *He said, "I loved the good things more than the remembrance of my Lord." Then, it [the sun] was hidden in the veil [of night]…* (38:32), *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:
It is said that this refers to the horses. They had busied him from his afternoon prayers until the prayer-time elapsed. It is related from ʿAlī, and in a Shiʿi narration, that this means that the prime time for the prayer had elapsed.

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is related from Ibn ʿAbbās:
I asked ʿAlī about this verse (38:32).
He said, "What have you heard about it, Ibn ʿAbbās?"
I said, "I heard Kaʿb say, 'Solomon was preoccupied with the horses that were paraded in front of him, until the prayer-time elapsed. So he said, 'Bring them back to me'—meaning the horses. There were fourteen horses, and he ordered that their legs and necks be cleaved with the sword, and he killed them all. Therefore, God stripped him of his kingdom for fourteen days, because he had wronged the horses by killing them."
ʿAlī said, "Kaʿb has lied. Solomon was engrossed with the horses when they were paraded before him on that day because he wanted to go for jihad against the enemy. Then the sun disappeared, so he said—with the [right to issue this] command from God—to the angels responsible for the sun, 'Bring it back to me.' They brought it back, and he prayed the afternoon prayer on time.

The prophets of God do not wrong others or command injustice, for they are protected from sin and purified."

Author's comments: The phrase attributed to Kaʿb al-Aḥbār—"and God stripped him of his kingdom" (*fa-salabahu Allāhu mulkahu*) alludes to a narration about Solomon's ring, which we shall mention later.

(3) In *al-Faqīh*, it is related from Imām al-Ṣādiq:

On that day, during the afternoon, horses were paraded before Solomon, the son of David, and he became preoccupied with looking at them until the sun disappeared and was hidden. So he told the angels, "Bring back the sun so I can pray my prayer on time," and they brought it back it. He stood and wiped his legs and neck like that, and this was their ablution for prayer. Then he stood and prayed. Then when he finished, it set, and the stars came out. That is what is meant by verses 38:30–33 (*And We bestowed Solomon upon David…then they wiped their legs and necks)*.

Author's comments: This narration is fine as long as it agrees with the wording of the verse (*then they wiped their legs and necks*). Once it has been established that the prophets can perform miracles, there is no problem with the idea of the sun being brought back; similar things have been narrated about others, like Joshua, the son of Nun, and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in narrations which are agreed-upon. Pay no heed to what al-Rāzī said in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*.

Many Sunni narrations relate that Solomon hamstrung the horses and struck their legs and necks; al-Qummī also relates this in his *Tafsīr*. All these narrations seem to trace back to Kaʿb, as, indeed, occurred in the previous narration related from Ibn ʿAbbās. In any case, this interpretation should be disregarded, for the reasons already mentioned.

Some of these narrations are so involved that they say that there were twenty-thousand horses—with wings! Similarly, it is related from Kaʿb that the "veil" in *it was hidden in the veil* was a veil of emerald, surrounding the world, which turned the sky green.

Likewise, astounding stories have been related about *We tried Solomon and placed a lifeless body on his throne* (38:34). For instance, it is said that Solomon had a son. Solomon ordered that he be nursed, then hid him in a cloud, lest the malicious jinn get to him. Another narration says that this was in fact out of fear of the Angel of Death, until, one day, his dead body plunged down to Solomon's throne.

It is also related that, one day, he said, "Tonight, I shall lie with one hundred women, each of whom will bear me a son who will be a knight, fighting in the way of God." However, he did not say "if God wills," and none of them conceived, except one, who gave birth to a son. Solomon loved him so greatly that some of the jinn hid him from the Angel of Death. But the Angel of Death came anyway, took him out of their hands, snatched up his soul, and left his body on Solomon's throne.

Similarly, a number of narrations, each tracing to Ibn ʿAbbās—who clarifies that he heard this from Kaʿb—say that Solomon's kingdom was vested in his ring, so, one day, one of the demons stole it from him. Immediately, his kingdom fell, and the demon took control over it for a number of days. Then, God returned his ring to him, and Solomon stepped back into his former position.

Other matters are also related about Solomon, but it is more appropriate to omit them out of respect for the sanctity of the prophets, even though these narrations attribute these things to him. For instance, regarding the verse *We tried Solomon and placed a lifeless body on his throne* (38:34), they say that the demon sat on Solomon's throne.

None of this can be taken seriously, in light of what we have already discussed. These narrations are fabrications, and the fabricators were having a field day with them.[1]

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1 Most of these narrations can be found in *al-Durr al-Manthūr.*

Verses 41–48

This is the third story telling the Prophet to be patient and mindful of the past. It tells of Job who was tried; then, God bestowed upon him healing and gifts. Then it tells the Prophet to remember Abraham and five of his descendants who were prophets.

وَاذْكُرْ عَبْدَنَا أَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الشَّيْطَانُ بِنُصْبٍ وَعَذَابٍ ﴿٤١﴾

(38:41) ***And remember Our servant Job, when he called out to His Lord: "Satan has afflicted me with toil and torment*** **(bi-nuṣb wa ʿadhāb)*!*"**

Here, Job implores God to heal him and dispel the calamites that had stricken him. He does not specifically verbalize what he is asking for out of humbleness and humility. However, the expression *His Lord* (rabbahu) implies that he was beseeching God in a time of distress.

Nūṣb means "exhaustion". *When he called out to his Lord…* hones in on who is meant by *Our servant* or *Job*.[1] "*Satan has afflicted me*" recounts Job's prayer.

Toil and torment alludes to calamities that had struck his health and family, as explicated by his prayer in Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ: "*Affliction (ḍarr) has befallen me, and You are the most merciful of the merciful!*" (21:83) Here, *affliction* is understood to include the difficulties he faced with his health and family. However, nothing in Sūrah Ṣād or Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ indicates that he lost his wealth; this is mentioned in narrations.

Satan has afflicted me with toil and torment expresses a cause-and-effect relationship, which is also specified in narrations. Illness and the like can be attributed both to Satan and to natural causes, because the two types of cause do not conflict since they do not operate at the same level of existence. Rather, one operates at a higher level than the other. We explained that in our exegesis of *Had the people of towns had faith and been reverent, We would have showered them will blessings from the sky* (7:96).

There is no reason to think that Satan cannot affect human beings

1 Lit. *badal ishtimāl*. [Trans.]

this way. Take this verse: *Wine, gambling, idols, and divining arrows are a defilement, wrought by Satan* (5:90). Here, these things are attributed to Satan. Similarly, Moses implies that Satan fomented killing in: *This is the work of Satan; he is a misguiding, clear enemy* (28:15).

If one closes their eyes to the narrations, it is possible to take this to mean that Satan caused this toil and torment by whispering into people's hearts. "Stay away from this man!" he whispered. "If he were truly a prophet, he would not be suffering so! He would never have come to this." Such did he slander, and so they slandered him, and mocked him.

Tafsīr al-Kashshāf actually rejects what we said. It insists:

> God would not grant Satan authority over His prophets, such that he might torment or exhaust whomever he wanted. If that were to happen, not a single righteous person would remain—Satan would have sent all of them spiraling into misery and misfortune! The Qur'an repeatedly says that Satan only has the authority to whisper to people.

However, the flaw with this argument is that the sinlessness enjoyed by the prophets and infallibles only protects them from being influenced by Satan's whispering inwardly. It does not protect from being harassed, exhausted, or otherwise vexed by Satan in other ways which do not entail misguidance; for instance, in their physical bodies or other aspects of their lives. There is no evidence to suggest that Satan cannot bother them in other ways. For instance, God relates that the boy accompanying Moses—who is none other than Joshua the prophet—said:

> "*I forgot the fish, and the only one who made me forget to mention it was Satan*" (18:63).

Furthermore, tinkering with the bodies of the prophets does not necessitate tinkering with their hearts. Satan may torment or weary the prophets to [inadvertently] fulfil a higher goal, such as demonstrating their patience with God or how they turn towards Him. Satan's grasp over their bodies does not place him outside of God's will. God decrees whatever He wills for all of His servants, and nothing happens without His permission.

ارْكُضْ بِرِجْلِكَ ۖ هَٰذَا مُغْتَسَلٌ بَارِدٌ وَشَرَابٌ ﴿٤٢﴾

(38:42) ***"Strike with your foot. This is cool [water], for washing and drinking."***

Here, God announces that Job's prayer was answered; this is understood

from the fact that this verse comes directly after the verse telling of his prayer. There are two possibilities for *"Strike with your foot…"*: either this was revealed directly to Job, or else it paraphrases something along the lines of, "We responded to him and told him to strike with his foot." The command *strike with your foot* implies—nay, specifies—that he was unable to stand and walk on his feet. His entire body had been afflicted, but God healed his feet and caused a spring to flow there. Then, He commanded him to wash in it and drink from it, until his entire body, inwardly and outwardly, was cured; this interpretation is bolstered by narrations, which shall be presented soon.

Some of this interpretation is elided from the verse. That is, the full sequence of events is that he struck with his foot, washed, drank, and was healed by God.

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ أَهْلَهُ وَمِثْلَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَذِكْرَىٰ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٤٣﴾

(38:43) ***And We gave him his family and their like, as a mercy from Us and a reminder to those with understanding.***

Narrations relate that he was tried with many things, including the death of his whole family, except for his wife. Then, God brought them back to life and gave him others as well, who were like them.

Some say that they were separated from him during his difficult times, but then God reunited all of them after he was healed. By then, his children had borne children, and so they were similar in number to how they had been before.

As a mercy from Us and a reminder to those with understanding: This phrase is framed as an object. That is, the implied meaning is, "We did what we did to him so that it would be a form of mercy from Us, and a reminder to those with understanding, that they may contemplate it."

وَخُذْ بِيَدِكَ ضِغْثًا فَاضْرِبْ بِهِ وَلَا تَحْنَثْ ۗ إِنَّا وَجَدْنَاهُ صَابِرًا ۚ نِعْمَ الْعَبْدُ ۖ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ ﴿٤٤﴾

(38:44) ***"And take in your hand a bundle of rushes* (ḍighthan)*, and strike therewith, and do not break your oath." And We found him patient. A most excellent servant! He ever turned [to Us].***

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

A *digh* is a handful of straw, hay, twigs, branches, or the like.

Job had sworn that if he was healed, he would strike his wife with one hundred lashes, since she had upset him over something, as will be mentioned in the section on narrations. So when God healed him, He told him to take a handful of rushes—one stalk for each lash—to thereby keep to the word of his oath.

This is something the verse hints at. It does not outright say anything about his wife, or why he swore this oath, out of politeness and respect towards him.

We found him patient: Meaning, We found him patient with Our trials—the loss of his health, family, and wealth. This expression offers further explanation for *and remember* (38:41) or *Our servant* (38:41); that is, it explains why He was called a servant, or why he was specifically called "God's servant". The first interpretation is preferable.

A most excellent servant! He ever turned [to Us]: This praises him.

وَاذْكُرْ عِبَادَنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ أُولِي الْأَيْدِي وَالْأَبْصَارِ ﴿٤٥﴾

(38:45) ***And remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—men of might and insight.***

This praises them by describing them as being full of might (*ayd*, from *yad*, "hand") and insight (*abṣār*, from *baṣar*, "vision"). A human's hand and eyes are praised when they are used what they are created for and serve a human in his essential humanity. That is, the hand is used to work righteous deeds, through which benevolence flows towards the creation, and the eyesight is used to discern the path towards safety and security, away from the pitfall of destruction; it is also used to pinpoint truth and avoid being perplexed by falsehood.

Their being possessed of might and insight ("hands and eyesight") is a metaphor for their stalwartness in obeying God and bringing goodness to others, as well as their insight in honing in on the truth in matters pertaining to faith and acts. Both meanings are synthesized in this verse:

> *And We delivered him as well as Lot to the land which We had blessed for all people. And We gave him Isaac and Jacob, a son's son, and We made them all good. And We made them Imams who guided by Our command, and We revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of the alms, and Us did they serve.* (21:71–73)

Thus, He made them imams. The divine command and revelation relate to their vision, and the doing of good, establishing the prayer, and giving alms relate to their hands. It is also narrated that this verse speaks of their strength and insight in worship.[1]

إِنَّا أَخْلَصْنَاهُمْ بِخَالِصَةٍ ذِكْرَى الدَّارِ ﴿٤٦﴾

(38:46) ***We purified them*** **(aklaṣnāhum bi-khāliṣatin, lit. "We purified them with a purification")** ***through the trait of remembering the [final] abode*** **(dār).**

Grammatically speaking, *purification* (khāliṣah) is an adjective used in place of what it is being described. The preposition *bi-* in *bi-khāliṣat*^{in} denotes causality, and means "for the sake of a purifying them completely". *Remembering the [final] abode* elaborates on "purification" and refers to the hereafter.

This verse provides an explanation for either *men of might and insight, Our servants,* or *And remember*, all of which fall in the previous verse; the first view is preferable. For when a person is wholly immersed in remembering the hereafter and nearness to the Lord of the Worlds, and it is their main preoccupation, that person must necessarily attain perfect cognizance near their Lord. Their sight shall pinpoint the truths of faith and yield insight into wayfaring on the path of worship. They shall be saved from the mere materiality of the worldly life and its adornments, just as the prophets were:

> *Therefore turn aside from whoever turns his back upon Our reminder and does not desire anything but the worldly life* (53:29).

Some exegetes say that *abode* (dār) refers to the worldly life [not the hereafter], and that the verse means that people will continue to speak well of them as long as the world subsists. To that end, they cite this verse: *We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and each one of them We made a prophet. We granted them Our mercy, and We left [behind them] a truthful mention of eminence for them.* (19:49–50) However, the previous view is better.

وَإِنَّهُمْ عِنْدَنَا لَمِنَ الْمُصْطَفَيْنَ الْأَخْيَارِ ﴿٤٧﴾

(38:47) ***They were with Us, of the elect*** **(al-muṣṭafīn),** ***the finest***

1 This is narrated in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* from Abū al-Jārūd from Imām al-Bāqir.

(al-akhyār).

As we said previously, being "chosen" (*muṣṭafīn*) necessitates full submission to God. This verse alludes to:

> *Allah chose Adam and Noah and the descendants of Abraham and the descendants of ʿImrān above the nations.* (3:33)

Akhyār is the plural of *khayr* ("good"), which is the opposite of "evil", according to what is said. Some say it is the plural of *khayyir* with doubled letter or *khayr* with a single letter, similar to how *amwāt* is the plural of *mayyit* or *mayt* ("dead body").

وَاذْكُرْ إِسْمَاعِيلَ وَالْيَسَعَ وَذَا الْكِفْلِ ۖ وَكُلٌّ مِنَ الْأَخْيَارِ ﴿٤٨﴾

(38:48) ***And remember Ishmael, Elisha, and Dhū al-Kifl; each of them is among the finest.***

The meaning here is clear.

Job in the Qur'an

His story in the Qur'an: The Qur'an only says that he was severely tried through his health and children; then, God granted him relief, healed him, and returned his family and their like to him, as a mercy from Him and a reminder to the servants (21:83–84).

Laudation: In Sūrah al-Anʿām, God lists him in the cohort of prophets descended from Abraham and praises them all handsomely (6:84–90). He also mentions him in Sūrah Ṣād, where he describes him as patient, the best of servants, and ever-turning towards God (38:44).

Narrations about Job

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related from Abū Baṣīr:[1]

I asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about the trials that Job endured when alive, and why he had to endure them.

Imām al-Ṣādiq replied: "God—the Mighty and Glorious—had blessed Job copiously, and Job was thankful for that. Back in those days, Iblīs was not kept from the divine throne. One day, when Iblīs ascended towards the throne, he caught sight of Job

1 This is related from al-Qummī's father, from Ibn Faḍḍal, from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Baḥr, from Ibn Muskān, from Abū Baṣīr.

thanking God for His blessings. Jealous, Iblīs said, 'O Lord, Job is only thanking you because of the worldly blessings You have gifted him with. Were You to deprive him of them, he would be an ingrate. Allow me to beset him in his worldly matters, so that You see that he will never thank you for Your blessings, ever again.'

"Iblīs was told: 'You may tinker with his wealth and offspring.'

"So Iblīs swooped down and beset all of Job's wealth and children. Nothing remained; however, Job thanked and praised God even more! So Iblīs implored, 'Allow me to beset his farmland, O Lord.'

"God said, 'Thus it shall be.'

"Then Iblīs went with his demon-minions to Job's farmland, blew onto it, and burnt it. Still, Job thanked and praised God even more.

"Iblīs went back to God and said, "O Lord, allow me to beset his sheep." Then Iblīs wiped out his sheep. Still, Job thanked and praised God even more."

"Iblīs said, 'O Lord, allow me to beset his health.' God assented and allowed him to afflict all of Job's body, except for his soundness of mind and his two eyes. So Iblīs blew onto Job, and Job became a giant sore, from head to toe. He lingered long like that, praising God and thanking him, until worms hatched in his body and wriggled their way out. He sent them back, saying, 'Go back to the place where God created you.' Thus, he stank, until his townspeople cast him out into the rubbish-heap outside their town.

"His wife was Raḥmah, the daughter of Ephraim, the son of Joseph, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. She was forced to resort to begging and gave him whatever she could get.

"When his difficulties had gone on long, and Iblīs saw his patience, he went to some of Job's associates who were monks, living in the mountains, and told them, 'Come and see this worshipper who has been afflicted. Let's go ask him what happened to him.'

"So they went to him, riding grey mules. When they approached Job, their mules recoiled at the stench. Glancing at each other, they walked to him. Among them was a young man. Sitting before him, they said, "Job, why don't you tell us what sin you committed? For we fear that God might destroy us if we asked Him [to

forgive you]. We cannot imagine that you would be suffering like this—in a way no one else has—unless there were some reason for it, something you have kept secret."

"Job said, 'By the glory of the Lord! Lord knows I never took a meal unless a guest or an orphan was eating with me. Whenever I was faced with two choices, both of which entailed obedience towards God, I always chose the one that was harsher on my body."

"The young man said, 'Shame on you! You embarrassed a prophet of God so much that you pushed him to publicize his worship, which used to be a secret.'

"Job said, 'O Lord, if only I could sit for judgment before You and plead my case!'

"So God send a cloud to him and declared, 'Job! Plead your case, for I have seated you for judgment. I am near and always have been!'

"He said, 'O Lord! You know that whenever I was faced with two choices, both of which entailed obedience towards you, I always chose the more difficult one. Did I not praise You? Did I not thank You? Did I not glorify You?'

"Ten thousand tongues called out from the cloud, 'Job! You used to worship God while the people knew not. You used to praise God, and glorify God, and exalt God, while the people knew not. And now you are angling for something in return from God, when this was God's blessing upon you?'

"Job took a fistful of dust and stuffed it in his mouth, then said, 'Yes, O Lord, You are the one who blessed me with this.'"

"So God sent an angel to him. The angel took his two feet and struck the ground with them. From there, a spring sprang up. Then it washed him in the water, and he became even more handsome and hale than ever. God grew green gardens for him and returned his family, property, children and farms to him, while an angel sat with him, speaking with him and keeping him company.

"His wife was on her way towards him, bringing a crust of bread. When she neared his usual spot, she saw that things had changed, and there were now two [other] men sitting there. Bursting into tears, she cried out, 'Job, what happened to you?'

"Job called back to her, and she came close and realized that

God had healed his body and restored His blessings upon Him. Immediately she fell into prostration, thanking God.

"Job saw that her forelocks had been shorn. This was because she had asked people for some food for Job. Since her forelocks were very beautiful, they told her, "Give us your forelocks in exchange." So she cut them off and traded them for food, then took it to Job. When he saw that her hair had been cut, he grew angry and swore that he would strike her with a hundred lashes. Then she told him why she had done it. Job regretted what he had sworn, and so God revealed to him, '*And take in your hand a bundle of rushes, and strike therewith, and do not break your oath*' (38:44). So he scooped up a handful of twigs and tapped her once, thusly fulfilling his oath."

Author's comments: Ibn ʿAbbās relates something similar from Wahab. He says that Job's wife was the daughter of Mīshā, the son of Joseph, and that he was so afflicted that people were repelled from him. While some narrations support this, other narrations from the Imāms of the family of the Prophet staunchly deny this, as will be mentioned.

(2) In *al-Khiṣāl*, it is related that Imām al-Bāqir said:[1]

Job was afflicted for seven years although he had committed no sin. The prophets do not sin, for they are protected and purified. They neither sin nor stray—neither big sins nor small ones.

Despite all of his difficulties, Job never exuded a foul odor, nor looked repulsive, nor oozed blood or pus—not even a drop. No one who saw him was repelled from him, nor did they shrink back in terror from him. Worms did not crawl out of his body. God never did this to any of His honored prophets or near ones (*awliyāʾ*). People left him because he was poor and appeared weak to worldly eyes, for they were ignorant of his status before his Lord. They did not realize that God was on his side and would soon bring relief.

The Prophet said: "Those afflicted with the greatest trials are the prophets, then those similar to them, and then those similar to them."

1 This is related from al-Qaṭṭān from al-Sakrī from al-Jawharī from Ibn ʿAmmārah from his father from Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad [Imām al-Ṣādiq], from Imām al-Bāqir.

God tried him enormously so that people would consider him unimportant lest they deify him when they saw the enormous blessings that God willed to bestow upon him; to show that there are two types of divine reward: earned and gifted; so they would not scorn the weak, the poor, or the ill since he had endured weakness, poverty, and illness; so they would know that God makes whoever He wills fall ill and heals whoever He wills, however he wills, through any means that He wills, and makes whomever He wishes a lesson for whomever He wills; that God brings fortune and misfortune to whomever He wills; and that He is mighty and glorious in all of that. His judgment is just. He is wise in his acts, and he only does things to His servants which are for their greater good. And all power is vested in Him.

(3) Regarding *And We gave him his family and their like, as a mercy from Us and a reminder to those with understanding* (38:43), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says:

God gave him back his family members, both those who had died before his time of trial and also those who had died afterwards. God brought them back to life, and they lived with him.

After he was healed, Job was asked, "What was the worst thing you went through?"

He replied, "The gloating of the enemies."

(4) Regarding *"Satan has afflicted me with toil and torment"* (38:41), *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:

It is said that his illness worsened until people avoided him and Satan began to whisper to them that they should toss him out like a piece of rubbish; they should not even let his wife, who had been looking after him, get near him. Although he was greatly pained by that, Job did not complain to anyone about it since his suffering was something that God had ordained.[1]

Qatādah says: "This continued for seven years." This is also narrated from Imām al-Bāqir.

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1 However, he complained about what Satan had done, since Satan was not God. [Trans.]

The Accounts of Al-Yasaʿ[1] and Dhū al-Kifl

God mentions both of their names in the Qur'an and includes them among the prophets whom He praises as well as the cream of the crop (38:48). He describes Dhū al-Kifl as one of the patient (21:85). Both are mentioned in narrations.

(1) In *Biḥār al-Anwār*, it is related from *al-Iḥtijāj*, *al-Tawḥīd*, and *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā* from a long narration related by al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī telling of Imām Riḍā's debate with the head of the Christian church (the Catholicos):
Imam al-Riḍā said: "Al-Yasaʿ did things similar to what Jesus did: he walked on water, raised the dead, and healed the blind and the leper. However, he was not taken as a lord."

(2) In *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, it is related from al-Ṣadūq from al-Daqāq from al-Asadī from Sahl from ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Ḥasanī:
I wrote to Imām al-Jawād asking him about Dhū al-Kifl—what was his name, and was he a divinely sent messenger?
He wrote back to me: "God, the Glorious, appointed one hundred twenty-four thousand prophets (*nabī*). Among them were three-hundred thirteen men who were messengers (*mursalīn*). Dhū al-Kifl was one of them. He came after Solomon, the son of David, and used to judge for them people like David had. He only grew angry for the sake of God, the Mighty and Glorious. His name was ʿUwaydiyā,[2] and he is the one whom God—glorious be His might!—mentions in the Qur'an: *And remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—men of might and insight* (38:45).

Author's comments: There are other narrations about both of their stories. However, we did not mention them here since they are weak and unreliable.

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1 Possibly Elisha. [Trans.]

2 Perhaps a variant of Obadiah, who is sometimes identified with Dhū al-Kifl. [Trans.]

Verses 49–64

This is another section discussing the fate of the reverent and the transgressors, offering glad tidings and warnings.

هَٰذَا ذِكْرٌ ۚ وَإِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ لَحُسْنَ مَآبٍ ﴿٤٩﴾

(38:49) ***This is a reminder, and the reverent shall meet a happy journey's end.***

This refers to the stories of the noble prophets who turned towards God which were previously mentioned. *Reminder* (dhikr) refers to the honor and praise they enjoyed, meaning, the ones whose names have lived on handsomely and beauteously; they shall be honored in this world evermore and shall bask in divine reward in the next.

Thus, exegetes say:

> *The reverent* (muttaqīn) refers specifically to the prophets mentioned earlier in this chapter, or all the reverent, of whom the prophets are a subgroup. The mention of the final abode of the transgressors, here, acts as an aside.

However, it [seems as if it is more] apparent that *this* refers to the Qur'an, and *dhikr* refers to its contents which act as a remembrance, especially since, at the beginning of this chapter, the word *dhikr* is used to refer to the Qur'an, in the verse *By the Qur'an, full of remembrance* (wal-qurʾān dhī al-dhikr, 38:31). Then, the chapter tells of what lies in the hereafter: reward for the reverent and punishment for the transgressors.

The reverent shall meet a happy journey's end **(maʾāb):** A *maʾāb* is a place that one returns to. It is indefinite here to lend it a sense of enormity. The meaning is clear.

جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ مُفَتَّحَةً لَهُمُ الْأَبْوَابُ ﴿٥٠﴾

(38:50) ***Everlasting gardens, whose doors are thrown open to them,***

Meaning, an eternal abode and eternal life there. "Opening the doors to them" is a figure of speech indicating that nothing will keep them from the delights found in them, for these shall be readied for them, created

for their sake.

Some exegetes say that "opening the doors to them" means that they will not have to wait or knock on them.[1] Other exegetes say that it describes the doors: they are doors that can be opened without any key or locked without any lock.

This verse and the next describe their happy abode.

مُتَّكِـِٔينَ فِيهَا يَدْعُونَ فِيهَا بِفَـٰكِهَةٍ كَثِيرَةٍ وَشَرَابٍ ﴿٥١﴾

(38:51) ***Reclining therein, calling for plenteous fruits and drink.***

Meaning, they will be reclining luxuriantly in it—something which gives the sense of honor and nobility.

Calling for plenteous fruits and drink…: Meaning that, there, they will have the authority to call for fruits—which are plentiful—and drink. Whenever they ask for a fruit or a drink, it will be brought to them without them having to exert any effort to procure it or get up and get it.

وَعِندَهُمْ قَـٰصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ أَتْرَابٌ ﴿٥٢﴾

(38:52) ***With them shall be [female companions] of modest gaze, equal in age.***

Them refers to the reverent. *Of modest gaze* (qāṣirat al-ṭarf) is an adjective acting as a noun for the thing it is describing.[2] It means that they shall have consorts of modest gaze. *Of modest gaze* either implies that they will be happy with their partners and have eyes only for them, or it is a figure of speech indicating that they will be coy and coquettish.

Atrāb means that they will be peers (*aqrān*). That is, they will be similar in age or handsomeness to their partners.[3] It could also mean that they reflect their partner's light and splendor; whenever their partners' light and splendor brightens, they shall grow even more beautiful.

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1 Obviously, there was no such thing as automatic doors in the classical Islamic era, but it is interesting to consider how many modern innovations mimic the descriptions of Paradise. [Trans.]

2 Although *qāṣirāt* is an adjective, it is in the feminine plural, thus indicating that it refers to women. [Trans.]

3 Of course, all inhabitants of heaven will be beautiful and handsome, regardless of how they looked in the material world! [Trans.]

هَـٰذَا مَا تُوعَدُونَ لِيَوْمِ الْحِسَابِ ﴿٥٣﴾

(38:53) ***This is what you have been promised for the Day of Accounting!***

This refers to what was said about the gardens and their delights. It shifts to the second person to convey a sense of nearness[1] and honor towards them, to polish off their manifest, materialized blessings with these spiritual blessings.

إِنَّ هَـٰذَا لَرِزْقُنَا مَا لَهُ مِنْ نَفَادٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(38:54) ***This is Our sustenance; it shall never dwindle away*** **(nafād).**

Nafād means "perish", "extinguish", or "run out". Read in light of the text, this verse comes across as a conclusion to the sentiment in the previous verse.

هَـٰذَا ۚ وَإِنَّ لِلطَّاغِينَ لَشَرَّ مَآبٍ ﴿٥٥﴾

(38:55) ***Thus it shall be. But the transgressors shall meet an evil journey's end.***

Thus refers to what was said about the happy end for the reverent. Possibly, it can also be taken in the sense of a verb (*ism fiʿl*); for instance, "Take this."

The rest of the verse is clear.

جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَوْنَهَا فَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ ﴿٥٦﴾

(38:56) ***Hell—they shall burn in it*** **(yaṣlawnahā)*; what an evil resting-place*** **(mihād)*!***

Yaṣlawnahā means that they shall enter the fire and endure its heat or aftereffects. According to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, *mihād* means "a bed that is laid out". The expression "I laid this bed for him in the best way (*mahadtu lahu tamhīd*^{an})" means "I prepared this for him nicely". This and the next

1 Presumably, ʿAllāmah means to say that it expresses how near God is to them, although, possibly, he could also have meant that it shows how near the delights of the garden are to them. [Trans.]

verse elaborate on what is lying in wait for the transgressors.

هَٰذَا فَلْيَذُوقُوهُ حَمِيمٌ وَغَسَّاقٌ ﴿٥٧﴾

(38:57) ***Thus it shall be. So let them imbibe boiling and oozing pus* (ḥamīmun wa ghassāq),**

Ḥamīm means "scorching". According to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, *ghassāq* means "fetid, stinking pus"; it has also been explained in other ways. *Boiling and oozing pus* (ḥamīm^{un} wa ghassāq) explains what is meant by *this*. *Let them imbibe* implies that they will not want to drink the boiling and oozing pus but will forced to. This sense is reinforced by the construction of the sentence, in that the object—*boiling and oozing pus*—is referred to by the demonstrative pronoun *this*, and the object—*this*—comes before the verb [whereas, usually, it would come afterwards]. All in all, it means, "This boiling ooze and pus—they have to drink it—they have no choice!"

وَآخَرُ مِنْ شَكْلِهِ أَزْوَاجٌ ﴿٥٨﴾

(38:58) ***And other similar things* (min shaklihi),** ***of the same type!***

Shakl means "a thing that resembles another and is of the same sort." *Azwāj* means "types" (*anwāʿ*) or "categories" (*aqsām*).[1] It means, "Here is something else, of the same type as the boiling and oozing fluids. There is a diverse feast of them; now you must drink them!"

هَٰذَا فَوْجٌ مُقْتَحِمٌ مَعَكُمْ ۖ لَا مَرْحَبًا بِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ صَالُو النَّارِ ﴿٥٩﴾ قَالُوا بَلْ أَنْتُمْ لَا مَرْحَبًا بِكُمْ ۖ أَنْتُمْ قَدَّمْتُمُوهُ لَنَا ۖ فَبِئْسَ الْقَرَارُ ﴿٦٠﴾ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا مَنْ قَدَّمَ لَنَا هَٰذَا فَزِدْهُ عَذَابًا ضِعْفًا فِي النَّارِ ﴿٦١﴾

(38:59–61) ***This troop storming blindly in with you—no welcome for them! They shall burn in the Fire. They shall say, "You—no welcome for you! You offered this to us, so evil be your abode." They will say, "Our Lord! Punish twice in the Fire whoever offered this to us!"***

1 As opposed to "pairs" or "mates", which is another meaning for the word. [Trans.]

A straightforward reading from the text indicates that these three verses foretell how vicious leaders and their followers will quarrel in the Fire.

This troop storming in blindly with you: This addresses the leaders. The demonstrative pronoun *this* implies that the leaders and their followers shall descend upon hell in a single battalion. *Muqtaḥim* means "storming in" or "bursting in" with vehemence and force.

No welcome for them! The leaders shall say this in reply to *this troop storming in blindly with you*. *Welcome* (marḥab[an]) is a greeting offered to someone who is arriving somewhere; it means "welcoming someone into one's home". *No welcome for them* means they shall not be welcomed warmly or accommodated.

They shall burn in the Fire: Meaning, they shall enter the fire and taste its heat or other effects. This builds on what is meant by "no welcome".

They shall say, "You—no welcome for you! You offered this to us, so evil be your abode": The followers will say to in reply their leaders, denying them any welcome and blaming them for bringing them to the Fire.

They will say, "Our Lord! Punish twice in the Fire whoever offered this to us!" God does not tell us here what the leaders say in response. However, it is mentioned in Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt when it tells of how they shall dispute:

> *They will say, "No, you were not believers. And we had no authority over you; you were a rebellious people* (37:29–30).

It is after they have finished arguing that they ask God to punish these people twofold.

Whoever offered this to us is a conditional phrase [along the lines of "if someone offered this to us, then punish them twice"]. *Twice* (ḍiʿf[an]) means "two of the same". Therefore, *punish twice* means to serve them a double helping of torment.

وَقَالُوا مَا لَنَا لَا نَرَىٰ رِجَالًا كُنَّا نَعُدُّهُمْ مِنَ الْأَشْرَارِ ﴿٦٢﴾

(38:62) ***And they shall say, "Why do we not see men whom we considered vicious?***

From the text, it can be understood that the dwellers in Hell are the ones saying this. By *men*, they are referring those whom the faithful thought were evil. However, they are in Paradise! They are looking for them in the Fire but cannot find them anywhere.

أَتَّخَذْنَاهُمْ سِخْرِيًّا أَمْ زَاغَتْ عَنْهُمُ الْأَبْصَارُ ﴿٦٣﴾

(38:63) Did we [just misjudge and] mock them, or have our eyes missed them?"

Meaning, did we err by making light of them when we were alive, whereas they have found salvation? Or did our eyes simply falter, and we simply did not see them, although they are in the Fire?

إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ لَحَقٌّ تَخَاصُمُ أَهْلِ النَّارِ ﴿٦٤﴾

(38:64) ***Thus be the truth—the way the Hell-dwellers shall wrangle!***

Thus (dhālik) refers to what was said about how they shall dispute. The use this word indicates that it is an established fact that the Hell-dwellers shall bicker with each other. There is no doubt in that, for it is, in essence, a manifestation of the trait lurking within themselves while alive—the propensity to feud and fight.[1]

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1 This explanation by ʿAllāmah follows along the lines of the belief that, in the hereafter, people's inner traits or good or evil deeds shall become visible and obvious to all. [Trans.]

Verses 65–88

This is the final section of this chapter commanding the Prophet to deliver his warning and invitation to the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). It also tells him to convey this sentiment: turning away from the truth and following Satan will lead a person to punishment in the Fire; this has been irrevocably decreed for Satan and his followers. With this, the chapter ends.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا مُنْذِرٌ ۖ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ إِلَّا اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ ﴿٦٥﴾ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفَّارُ ﴿٦٦﴾

(38:65–66) ***Say: "I am but a warner, and there is no god but Allah—the One, the Subduer, the Lord of the heavens and the earth and what lies between them—the Mighty, the Forgiving."***

These two verses command the Prophet to proclaim that is a warner, and that God is one in His divinity. *I am but a warner* confines his aim to warning people, as opposed to other aims that people might suspect him of in his prophetic mission, like seeking wealth or position, as is alluded to in: *Say: "I do not ask you for any reward for it, and I am not a pretender* (38:86).

"There is no god but Allah—the One, the Subduer, the Lord of the heavens and the earth and what lies between them—the Mighty, the Forgiving": This asserts the oneness of God through the proof vested in His attributes or divine names.

There is no god but Allah denies any other divinity. A god (*ilāh*) is something which is rightfully worshipped other than God. Establishing the divinity of God thereby requires the concession that there is no god but Him. Islam and polytheism (*shirk*) have no quarrel over God's divinity; rather, the quarrel is over whether God alone has the right to be worshipped, or whether there are others.

The divine attributes mentioned in these two verses are attributes which establish God's divinity since they act as proof that there are no other gods but God.

***The One, the Subduer* (al-wāḥid, al-qahhār):** These attributes

demonstrate God's oneness and grasp over all things. This is because God is the One whom nothing resembles. His perfection is infinite, and is the same with His existence as the Necessary Existent.. He is intrinsically and absolutely needless; however, other beings are in need of Him in all respects. Nothing enjoys existence or the effects of existence unless God blesses them with it and bestows it upon them. Hence He has power over all things, to do whatever He wills. All things obey His will and humble themselves before Him.

This intrinsic submission is the reality of servitude and worship. Suppose that it were acceptable to worship other things in existence, apart from God, in whatever manner could be deemed "worship". This, in truth, would be worship of God, for all things are subject to His decree, under His power, and obedient to Him. They have no true control over themselves or anything else. They lack an independent existence as well as the corollaries of existence. Therefore, God—exalted be He!—is the only being truly worthy of worship—nothing else.

Lord of the heavens and the earth and what lies between them: Here, another argument is employed to argue for God's oneness in divinity. That is, a single order flows through the natural world. The natural world is neither fragmented nor composed of separate precincts. This, in and of itself, is a sign that one divinity administers it all. Repeatedly, it has been said that the creation and management of the universe go hand-in-hand and are inseparable; fashioning a thing is essentially managing it, and vice versa. The creator and instantiator of the heavens and earth and all that lies between them is God. He is even the god of His foes! He administers everything, and therefore is singular in His divinity. Therefore, He is the only one to whom worship should be directed towards, since worship enacts the relationship of servitude, governance, and guardianship between existents and God as well as His bestowing of blessings and dispelling of anger with regards to the worshipper. So He is God, exalted be He, the god of the heavens and the earth and all between them. There is no god but He—understand that!

Possibly, *Lord of the heavens and the earth and what lies between them* is an elaboration on the attribute of God *the Subduer* (al-qahhār) or the phrase *the One, the Subduer* (al-wāḥid, al-qahhār).

The Mighty, the Forgiving: This presents another argument for God's oneness in His godhood. That is, He is mighty: none can force him to do anything He does not will, nor prevent Him from exerting His will. He

is absolutely mighty, whereas other things fall meek and obedient before Him. Since worship is a demonstration of one's meekness, it is unfit for anyone except the Mighty, and all might is vested in Him.

Furthermore, the underlying goal of worship—and by this is meant performing acts of worship—is to come closer to the worshipped, to dispel the blemish of remoteness. This is accomplished through the forgiveness of sins. God alone dispenses His never-ending treasuries of mercy and brings His servants to the honorable abode in the hereafter. Therefore, He is the Forgiving who must be worshipped out of eagerness for His forgiveness.

Possibly, *the Mighty, the Forgiver* hints at the underlying impetus behind the Prophet's call to the oneness of God, or why one should have faith in it. This is because *There is no god but Allah—the One, the Subduer* can be taken to mean: "I call you to the oneness in God, so believe! For He is mighty, untarnished by meagerness. And He forgives sins; therefore, He must be the true deity."

قُلْ هُوَ نَبَأٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٦٧﴾ أَنْتُمْ عَنْهُ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(38:67–68) ***Say: "It is a tremendous tiding; you are turning aside from it.***

It (huwa) refers to what was spoken of regarding the oneness of God, in *there is no god but Allah…* (38:66).

Some exegetes say that *it* refers to the Qur'an since it is the tremendous tidings (*nabaʾ ʿaẓīm*)[1] which they are turning away from. To them, this better suits the preceding verses, which are about the Qur'an, as well as the subsequent verse: *I had no knowledge of the exalted assembly when they disputed* (38:69). That is, he had no knowledge of this until the Qur'an spoke of it. Some say that it actually refers to the Day of Judgment, but this is the least likely of the above views.

مَا كَانَ لِيَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ بِالْمَلَإِ الْأَعْلَىٰ إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(38:69) ***I had no knowledge of the exalted assembly when they disputed.***

1 As in Qur'an 78:2. See the exegesis for that section (Volume 40 of the English translation) for ʿAllāmah's view on whether or not *al-nabaʾ al-ʿaẓīm* there can be taken to mean the Qur'an.

The *exalted assembly* (al-malaʾ al-aʿlā) is an assemblage of angels. It seems to refer to this:

> *When your Lord said to the angels, "I am placing a caliph on earth," they said, "What? Are you going to place someone on it who will cause mischief and shed blood, while we glorify, praise, and sanctify You?" He said, "I know what you do not."* (2:30)

Therefore, this verse comes across as meaning: "I did not know about the dispute among the angels on high until God revealed it to me in His book. I am but a warner and follow the revelation."

إِنْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ إِلَّا أَنَّمَا أَنَا نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٧٠﴾

(38:70) ***"Naught is revealed to me save that I am a clear warner."***

This verse reinforces *"I am but a warner"* (38:65) and explains why *"I had no knowledge of the exalted assembly when they disputed"* (38:69). It means: "I did not know that because my knowledge does not come from my own self. Rather, it comes from revelation, and I only receive the revelation that pertains to [the divine] warning."

إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِنْ طِينٍ ﴿٧١﴾

(38:71) ***When your Lord told the angels: "I am going to create a mortal from clay."***

From the text, it can be deduced that this and the next verse are not part of what the Prophet was being told to say [in verses 38:65–70]. This can be understood from the expression *your Lord* (*rabbuka*, with a singular "you"). They refer to the time when the angels deliberated on high. The *when* in *when your Lord told the angels* either refers to the time *when they disputed* (38:69) or refers to something left unspoken which would mean something along the lines of: "Recall when your Lord said to the angels…." God's two utterances to the angels—*"I am placing a caliph on earth"* (2:30) and *"I am going to create a mortal from clay"* (38:71)—are intertwined and occur in the same time frame, denoted by *when* (idh).

Therefore, *when your Lord told the angels* can be best explicated as: "Remember the time when your Lord said this-and-that; this was the time that they disputed."

Some exegetes hold that *when your Lord said…* explicates *when they disputed*. They take these statements as a dialogue between God, the angels,

and Iblīs. God says: "*I am placing a caliph on earth*" (2:30). They say: *What? Are you going to place someone on it who will cause mischief and shed blood, while we glorify, praise, and sanctify You?"* (2:30) Then, the dialogue continues with what God says to Adam, and what Adam says back to God. After that, God tells them: "*I am creating a mortal*" (38:72), at which time Iblīs says what he says, followed by God's reply.

Taking *dispute* (yakhtaṣimūn) to mean "quarrel" or "disagreement", they hold that *when they disputed* indicates that the disagreement occurred between the angels themselves, not between the angels and God. When God says *"I am placing a caliph on earth…I am creating a mortal,"* He says this through the intermediary of an angel. Similarly, when God speaks to Adam and Iblīs, he also does it through an angel. When the angels say things like, *"Are you going to place someone on it who will cause mischief and shed blood,"* they are also speaking to the angelic representative. Thus, the disagreement occurs between the angels themselves.

However, you can see that not a single iota of this view can be deduced from the text.

I am creating a mortal from clay: *Bashar* ("human", "mortal") means the human being. al-Rāghib says:

Bashar is used for the outer layer of human skin and *adamah* for the inner layer. Therefore, the *literati* have said that *bashar* is used as an expression for the human being since the human being is covered in skin and human hair, as opposed to animals, which have wool or fur. *Bashar* may be used for the singular or plural. However, the Qur'an uses *basharayn* as the dual form: *"Should we have faith in two men* (basharayn)" (23:47). *Bashar* is used in the Qur'an to speak about the human body and outer human form.

This verse says that the human being was made from clay (*ṭīn*), but Sūrah al-Rūm says that the human being was made from dust (*turāb*, 30:20), Sūrah al-Ḥijr says that the human being was made from "dried clay, made of moulded mud" (*ṣalṣāl*^{in} *min ḥama*$^{\supset in}$, 15:28), and Sūrah al-Raḥmān says that the human being was made of "dry clay like pottery" (*ṣalṣāl kal-fakhkhār*, 55:14). However, this is fine, since these are all varying states of the original material that the human being was created of; each of these verses refers to one of the states.

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(38:72) ***When I have fashioned him and breathed part of My spirit into him, fall before him in prostration."***

Fashioned (sawwaytuhu) here means to equip the human being with his limbs and complete the human form. *Breathed part of My spirit into him* means to give the human being a living human spirit. *My* is used in *My spirit* as an expression of honor. *Fall* is a command for them to fall from the verb root *w-q-ᶜ*. The implication is that they should fall because God has fashioned the human and breathed part of His spirit into him.

فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

(38:73) ***The angels did obeisance, all of them.***

The readiest interpretation of the verse is that all the angels did prostration without exception.

إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ اسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

(38:74) Except Iblis; he was proud and faithless.

However, Iblīs was too proud and did not prostrate; he was a faithless ingrate, as God says in Sūrah al-Ḥijr: *"I am not one to prostrate to a moral whom You created from dried clay, made of moulded mud"* (15:33).

قَالَ يَا إِبْلِيسُ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَنْ تَسْجُدَ لِمَا خَلَقْتُ بِيَدَيَّ ۖ أَسْتَكْبَرْتَ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْعَالِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾

(38:75) ***He said: "O Iblis! What stopped you from doing obeisance to the one whom I created with My two hands? Are you too proud or too exalted?"***

Created with My two hands expresses a special relationship between God and the human being. It conveys a sense of being honored, as does *[I] breathed part of My spirit into him* (38:72). *My two hands*—instead of *My single hand*—conveys God's full care and attention to His creation, for when a human does something that is important to him, he uses both hands. The expression *I created with My two hands* resembles the expression *of what Our hands wrought* (36:71).

Some exegetes take *hand* to mean "power" and *two hands* as a form

of emphasis, such as in the expression *Turn your gaze back twice* (67:3). This interpretation is also mentioned in narrations.

Some exegetes also understand *two hands* to mean the blessings of this world and the next. Possibly, it could be taken to mean the material and spiritual aspects of the human being, or body and soul; or else the divine attributes of grandeur and beauty (*jalāl* and *jamāl*).[1] However, there is no evidence for these views in the text.

"Are you too proud or too exalted* (min al-ʿālīn)*?" This question censures him. Why is it you did not prostrate? Are you too arrogant? Or are you too lofty to be ordered to prostrate?

Some exegetes deduce from this verse that the *ʿālīn* are a group of created beings who are so immersed in their Lord that they sense nothing but Him.[2]

Other exegetes take *ʿālīn* to mean arrogance, as in *Pharaoh was high and mighty* (ʿāl^{in}) *in the land* (10:83). In this case, the verse would mean, "Did you wax arrogant only after you were ordered to prostrate, or were you always that way?" However, this interpretation does not concord with the text, since the verse is asking why he is arrogant, not clarifying whether he had always been arrogant or had recently become that way.

Some exegetes say that the *ʿālīn* are the angels of the heavens, whereas the angels who were ordered to prostrate were the angels on the earth. However, the verse does not support this view since it implies that the angels, in general, were ordered to prostrate.

قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ ۖ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ ﴿٧٦﴾

(38:76) ***He said: "I am better than him. You created me from fire, and you created him from clay."***

Here, Iblīs explains why he did not prostrate: it is because he feels he is innately superior to human beings. Since he was created from fire, he

1 That is, how these attributes are manifested in human beings. Attributes of *jalāl* express God's awesomeness and grandeur, and attributes of *jamāl* express God's beauty and lovingness. These two categories are sometimes considered to be archetypal male and female qualities. [Trans.]

2 That is, in this interpretation, the question would be asking if Iblīs is one of these *ʿālīn* who is unable to perceive anything but God, rather than just asking if he is too high and mighty to prostrate. [Trans.]

is better than Adam, who was created from clay. In his answer, Iblīs hints that he feels that divine commands should only be obeyed if they seem right to him, not simply because they have been commanded or for their own sake; since he felt this was not right, he did not do it. This, in turn, is rooted in the fact that Iblīs did not accept God's overarching dominion or rule. This is the root of all sins and acts of disobedience; they arise when someone considers himself to be outside the realm of worshipping God and outside of His domain. Then, deeming it better to abstain from the divine command, he turns away from it; thus are misdeeds perpetrated.

قَالَ فَاخْرُجْ مِنْهَا فَإِنَّكَ رَجِيمٌ ﴿٧٧﴾ وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكَ لَعْنَتِي إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٧٨﴾

(38:77–78) ***He said: "Go forth! You are now outcast*** **(rajīm).** ***And My curse shall be upon you until the Day of Judgment*** **(yawm al-dīn).***"*

Rajīm means *rejected. Yawm al-dīn* is the Day of Resurrection.

And My curse shall be upon you **(wa inna ʿalayka laʿnatī):** Sūrah al-Ḥijr says: *And upon you is the curse (*wa inna ʿalayka al-laʿnah*).* Although the two expressions are subtly different, it has been observed that whether the definite article *al-* in *laʿnah* denotes something already known (*lām al-ʿahd*) or a general type of something (*lām al-jins*), there is no difference between the expressions, since, in addition to the divine curse, the curse of angels and humans is also upon him. He is truly outcast, banished from divine mercy at the command of God.

قَالَ رَبِّ فَأَنْظِرْنِي إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾ قَالَ فَإِنَّكَ مِنَ الْمُنْظَرِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْوَقْتِ الْمَعْلُومِ ﴿٨١﴾

(38:79–81) ***He said: "My Lord, reprieve me until the day they are raised." He said: "You are one of those who has been granted respite until the known time."***

Although Iblīs asks to be reprieved until the Day of Judgment, God grants him a reprieve until "the known time" (*yawm al-waqt al-maʿlūm*, lit. "the day of the known time"). *The known time* refers to the last day of the world, since this is the last day on which a person can disobey their Lord; it occurs before the Day of Judgment. *Day* denotes a time when [rather than a specific day or a solar day], as emphasized by *waqt* (time).

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٨٢﴾ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(38:82–83) ***He said: "By Your might* (bi-ʿizzatika)*, I will beguile them, all of them—except your purified servants."***

The *bi-* in *bi-ʿizzatika* denotes an oath, meaning, "I swear by Your might, I shall mislead them all," except for the purified, who are the ones whose souls God has purified; neither Satan nor anyone else can tinker with them.

قَالَ فَالْحَقُّ وَالْحَقَّ أَقُولُ ﴿٨٤﴾ لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْكَ وَمِمَّنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

(38:84–85) ***He said: "This is the truth, and the truth I speak: I shall fill hell with you and your followers, all of them."***

This is God's reply to Iblīs. It pronounces the divine decree against Iblīs and his followers: the Fire.

The truth* (fal-ḥaqq)*: Either the subject or predicate of this sentence is elided. *Fa-* here denotes a sequence of events. *Truth* here means the opposite of falsehood, especially since it is repeated twice and is preceded by the definite article *al-*. It refers here to anything whatsoever that opposes falsehood. The expression means: "I swear by it, I shall fill hell with you and whoever follows you" or "My word is true; I shall fill hell with you and whoever follows you."

The truth I speak* (wal-ḥaqq aqūl)*: This is a parenthetical sentence conveying that this is an irrevocable divine decree. It also refutes Iblīs's claim that *I am better than him. You created me from fire, and you created him from clay* (38:76) or that God ordered him to prostrate unrightfully. *Truth* comes before the verb and is preceded by the definite article *al-* to indicate limitation [that is, God speaks nothing but the truth].

I shall fill hell with you and your followers, all of them: This is the decree passed against Iblīs. *You* refers to *shayāṭīn* in general, including Iblīs, his descendants, and his tribe. *Your followers* refers to humans who follow Iblīs.

We have already discussed this sufficiently in the exegesis on similar verses in Sūrah al-Ḥijr, Sūrah al-Baqarah, Sūrah al-Aʿrāf, and Sūrah al-Isrāʾ; the reader may refer to them.

قُلْ مَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُتَكَلِّفِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

(38:86) ***Say: "I do not ask you for any reward for it, and I am not a pretender."***

This returns to the theme introduced at the beginning of the chapter and developed throughout: the Qur'an is a reminder, and the Prophet is but a warner, nothing else. It also refutes their view that they should just *"Keep adhering patiently to your gods. This is what is desired"* (38:6).

I do not ask for you any reward for it shows that the Prophet is not seeking wealth or status. *I am not a pretender* means that the Prophet is not a charlatan. A pretender (*mutakallif*) is a person who makes up something and dresses it up as something that it is not.

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

(38:87) ***"This is naught but a reminder to the nations."***

Meaning, the Qur'an is a reminder to all peoples, of all tribes and nations; it is not only for one group but not another, such that they might take money for reciting or teaching it. Rather, it is for all.

وَلَتَعْلَمُنَّ نَبَأَهُ بَعْدَ حِينٍ ﴿٨٨﴾

(38:88) ***"And certainly you will come to know about it after a time."***

Meaning, you will come to know of what the Qur'an has said about the Resurrection, the prevalence of Islam over other faiths, and other things after the passage of time.

Some exegetes say that *after a time* refers to the Day of Judgment. Others say it is the moment of death, or the Battle of Badr. It is not unreasonable to say that there may be several times intended here for each type of thing that will be come to be known. That is, *after a time* does not specify one single day; rather, each type of thing will be known in its own time.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, with a chain of narration from Ismāʿīl al-Juʿfī, in a long narration which mentions Prophet's heavenly ascent (*miʿrāj*), Imām al-Bāqir relates from the Prophet:

God said: "O Muḥammad!"
I said: "I am here, O Lord!"
He said: "What did the angels on high dispute over?"
He said: "Glory be to You—I have no knowledge except what You have taught me."
He placed His hand—meaning the Hand of Power—in the middle of my chest, and a chill struck between my shoulders. Whenever He asked me about something that had happened or what would happen, I knew it.
Then He said: "O Muḥammad! What did the angels on high dispute about?"
I said: "Expiations (*kaffārāt*), degrees (*darajāt*), and divine reward (*ḥasanāt*).

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Ibn ʿAbbās relates from the Prophet:
My Lord said to me: "Do you know what the angels on high disputed about?"
I said: "No."
He said: "They disputed about expiations (*kaffārāt*) and degrees (*darajāt*). Expiations (*kaffārāt*) are performing ablutions on cold nights, walking to the congregational prayers, and waiting for one prayer after another. Degrees (*darajāt*) are greeting others, feeding others, and performing the midnight prayers (*ṣalāt al-layl*) while people are sleeping."

Author's comments: This is also related in *al-Khiṣāl* from the Prophet, except that the explanations of *kaffārāt* and *darajāt* are flipped. It is also related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*. The narration in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* has many chains of narration from a number of the companions from the Prophet, although the narrations differ with each other.

In any case, applying these narrations directly as interpretations of the verse does not concord with the text itself. Furthermore, there is no evidence that these narrations were intended as exegesis of this verse. Possibly, the angels' dispute mentioned here was over something else, not what was mentioned in the verse.

(3) In *Nahj al-Balaghāh* [it is related that Imām ʿAlī said]:
Praise be to God who has clad Himself with honor and dignity, and chose these things for Himself and none others in His creation. He made them part of His inaccessible inner sanctum, and chose them due to His glory. Then he placed a curse upon any of

his servants who might try to strip Him of them.

Thus He tested his closest angels, to distinguish the humble from the arrogant. Although He knows what lies hidden in the hearts and inner secrets, he said: "*I am going to create a mortal from clay. When I have fashioned him and breathed part of My spirit into him, fall before him in prostration.*" *The angels did obeisance, all of them—except Iblis….* (38:71–74)

Iblīs's pride swelled. Feeling that he was innately better than Adam, he was prejudiced against him from the start. So God made him the leader of the nationalist[1] fanatics and the forebear of the arrogant—and arrogance is the basis of prejudice and partisanship. He grasped at God's cloak of grandeur and donned the garment of haughtiness, while shedding the vestments of humility. Do you not see how God belittled him for his arrogance and humiliated him for feigning to be high? God made him an outcast in this world and kindled an inferno for him in the next.

(4) In *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, it is related via a chain of narration from Muḥammad ibn ʿUbaydah:

I asked [Imām] al-Riḍa about what God said to Iblīs: *"O Iblis! What stopped you from doing obeisance to the one whom I created with My two hands"* (38:75) [That is, what is the meaning of *My two hands*?]

He said: "It means 'by My power and Might.'"

Author's comments: Something similar is related in *al-Tawḥīd* via a chain of narration from Muḥammad ibn Muslim from [Imām] al-Ṣādiq.

We have mentioned other narrations about this story in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Baqarah, Sūrah al-Aʿraf, Sūrah al-Ḥajar, and Sūrah al-Isrāʾ, which the reader can refer to.

(5) In *Jawāmiʿ al-Jāmiʿ*, it is related from the Prophet:

There are three signs of a pretender: he disputes with the one who is superior to him, he pursues what he never attains, and he speaks of what he does not know.

Author's comments: Something similar is related in *al-Khiṣāl* from [Imām] al-Ṣādiq in an account of Luqmān's exhortation to his son. It is also related via Sunni chains; some narrations say *yunāzil man fawqihi*

1 Nationalism, as a term, is rather modern, but seems to express what is meant here in a way meaningful to the contemporary world. [Trans.]

("he fights with his superior") instead of *yunāziᶜ man fawqihi* ("he disputes with his superior").

The end. All praise be to Almighty God.

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